

異世界料理道

Cooking with
wild game

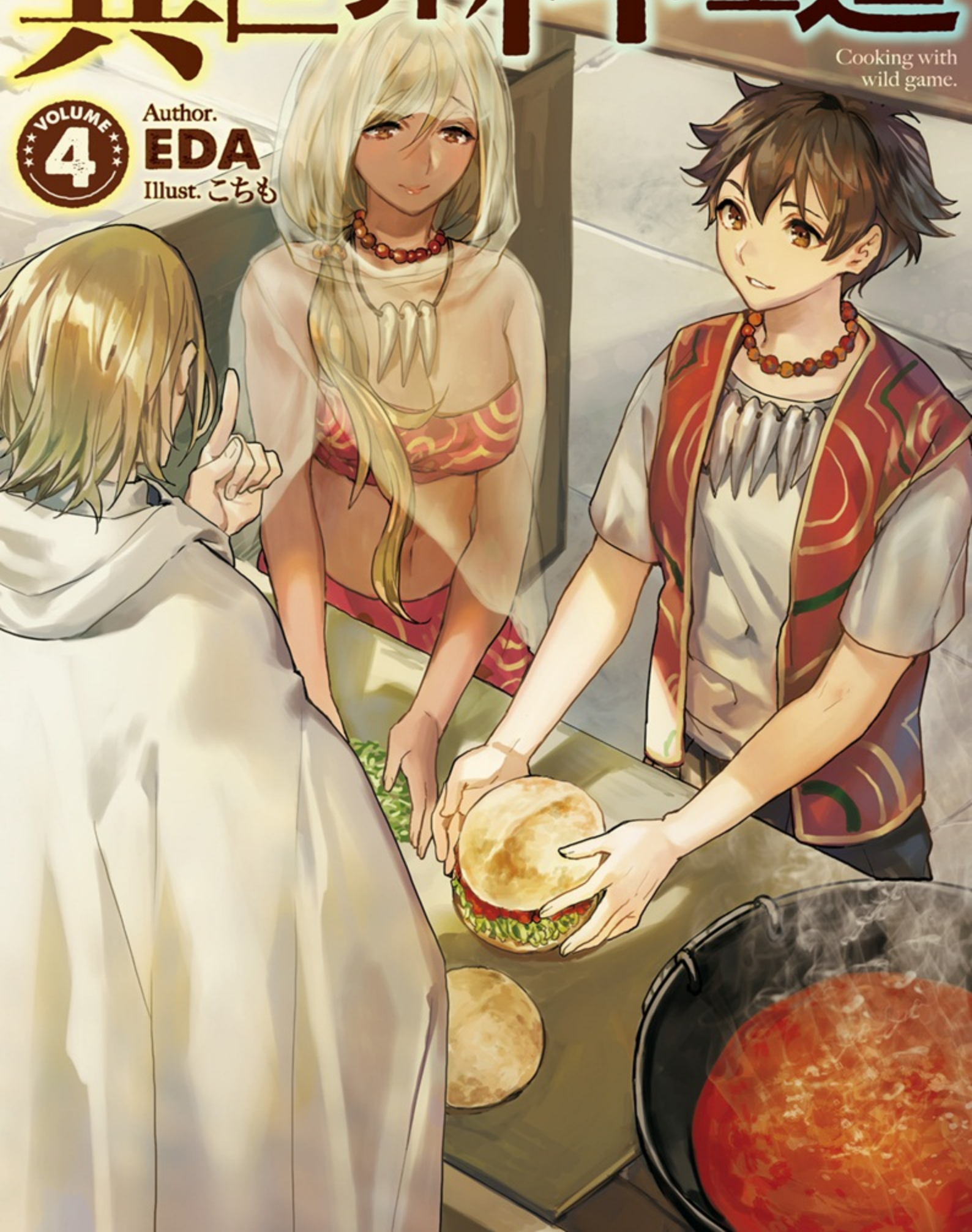
Cooking with
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Cooking with Wild Game

– Isekai Ryouridou –

- Volume 4 -

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[Skythewood]

「ああ、最後に一つだけ。」

アスタに相談というか提案があるんだけど」

「君、宿場町で店を開いてみないかい？」

あまりに口くでもない話だったら、
それをきっかけに縁を切ってやろうか—
ぐらいに考えていたのだが、
この男の素っ頓狂っぷりは、
俺の想像を遥かに凌駕してしまっていた。

カミュア＝ヨシュ

宿場町でアスタが出会った、どこか
胡散臭さが抜けない男。
飄々としていて真意がつかみづらい
が、アスタや森辺の民に悪い印象は
持っていないようで—。

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VOLUME
4

津留見明日太／アスタ

異世界から森辺に迷い込んだ
見習い料理人。
宿場町でギバ肉を広めることの
メリットを知り、出店を悩み中。

——ジェノスの宿場町

森辺の民との交流がありつつも、
未だ偏見の拭えない土地、ジェノス。
森辺と二番身近でありながらも、
遠い隣人であったこの町は
アスタという変化を受けて
どのように変わっていくのか——

アイ＝ファ

ファ家の家長。
女性ながら、家を守るために
狩りをしている。
アスタのハンバーグが気に入り。

やがて意を決したように、
肉感的な唇を開き——ぱくりと、
『ギバ・バーガー』にかじりついた。

「……美味しいわあ……」

もしかしたらヴィナルウは、
流し目をくれたり身体をくねらせたりするよりも、
ちよつと幼げに振る舞ったほうが魅力も倍增するのではないだろうか。



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Presented by

EDA

Chapter 1

The day of chaos

Part 1

After finishing work that comes up once in a lifetime— house Lutim's banquet, the next day—

Ai Fa and I walked on the solid yellow ground.

After ending the job that lasted six days, we bid farewell to the Wu clan village and headed home.

“Really now, I wanted to help clean up after the banquet too.”

I couldn't help but complain on our way home.

I overslept and didn't take part in cleaning up the aftermath of the banquet.

The sun would reach the top of the sky soon.

After coming to this different world, I followed its principle of sleeping and rising early. But I was too exhausted yesterday, and I felt really bad about not getting up.

Ai Fa walked energetically and glanced sideways at me.

“You're still talking about that? Your job is to cook the dishes for the banquet, you don't need to mind these trivial matters.”

“No, this has nothing to do with my responsibility, I just wanted to work together with everyone until the very end.”

When morning came— which was just an hour ago, I woke up and rushed out of my rented room, but there was no trace of the banquet left at all.

The makeshift stoves made from stones, the stage for the newlyweds, the tall stands for the torches and the ceremonial fire— all that had been cleared away. The space before me was vast and empty, as if the banquet last night was just a dream.

After asking Ai Fa, I learned that the entire village got up after sunrise to clean up the place after the banquet.

“It feels lonely after the rowdy festival ended, and now, I felt as if a hole had been opened in my chest.”

Furthermore, I would be bidding farewell to the Wu clan village that I had been staying in for the past six days.

In the past six days, I made many friends.

I didn’t know how to interact with the men from the Wu clan in the beginning, but after teaching them about the bloodletting and dismembering process, I felt it hard to describe the sense of closeness and trust between them and me. Even more so for the Wu clan women who worked hard to cook the dishes with me.

This made the depression I felt even stronger.

“Never mind, Ai Fa, as long as you are by my side, everything will be fine!”

After I announced how I felt loudly, Ai Fa who was walking besides me kicked my leg.

“It’s about time for you to change your mindset. There’s another troublesome matter awaiting us today.”

“Yes, I know.”

About an hour later, we reached our home after being away for six days— There was a blonde man in a cloak waiting there for us.

“Hi, Ai Fa and Asuta, I’m glad that you both look well.”

The man was tall and skinny, just like a mantis.

Messy blonde hair with a scuffy beard to match.

A narrow face, nose, drooping eyes and an always smiling face.

This man had incredible purple eyes, the innocence of a child and the maturity of an elderly man.

This mysterious man of unknown origins was Kamyua Yost.

“I have come to visit as promised. Can you speak with me?”

“Yes, thank you for making the trip here, we wanted to discuss something with you too.”

Kamyua Yost replied with a happy smile in response to me.

“I’m glad for your hospitality. Beautiful female hunter, I hope that you are well too.”

“.....”

“Please don’t spoil my house head’s mood... Let’s talk inside. I’ll take care of your blades.”

“I see. Is that a custom of Forest's Edge? That’s good. I couldn’t help smiling at the prospect of having my curiosity satiated.”

Kamyua Yost said carefreely, and removed the sword on his waist, and handed it to me, scabbard and all.

His sword was longer than the saber in Forest's Edge. But it was thinner, so it weighed about the same as a saber.

By the way, what was this sword used for?

“...This way please.”

Ai Fa, me, and the guest went through the door in that order.

The Fa house was still the same.

Ai Fa took off her shoes, hung her cape on the wall and sat in her usual seat of honour.

But she didn’t let down her guard. She placed her saber which she usually leans against the wall by her side.

I sat beside her, and placed the guest’s sword besides me just like her

Kamyua Yost showed no intention of removing his cloak, and sat at the bottom seat.

...What a strange uncle.

Kamyua Yost helped us when we were in trouble in the Post Station Town. After that, he created an uproar in the Wu village that almost led to bloodshed. This was the third time we met.

No matter how many times I meet him, I couldn’t tell what he was thinking from his frivolous smiling face.

“Alright then— I would like to apologize to you two.”

“Apologize?”

As I tilted my head quizzedly, Kamyua Yost’s lips turned up in a smile.

“When we first met in the Post Station Town, I said many unnecessary things that confused you. I have no intention of being hostile to the chief Tsun clan without being provoked.”

He suddenly cut to the chase.

“And so, I hope you won’t think of me as an enemy, and misunderstand me as attempting to attack a denizen of Forest’s Edge. I’m here to visit because I want to build a relationship with the denizens of Forest’s Edge. Will you believe me?”

Ai Fa didn’t say a word, keeping one knee up as she sat with her legs pulled in, giving off a dignified aura.

I didn’t know what Kamyua Yost thought of the silent Ai Fa, but he continued talking smoothly:

“Back then, I progressed the topic a little too fast. I have always been curious about the denizens of Forest’s Edge, and when I got the chance to speak with the two of you, and a beautiful lady like Ai Fa on top of that, I might have acted imprudently. I hope you can forgive me.”

After hearing that, Ai Fa remained expressionless and didn’t say a word.

This was the second time Ai Fa had met Kamyua Yost. She had already braced herself, and could ignore his frivolous words.

My job was to probe what he was really thinking through dialogue.

“Kamyua Yost, can you tell me what is your objective?”

“Just call me Kamyua... What do you mean by objective?”

“I know you are visiting Forest’s Edge since you are in the vicinity for your work, but why go out of your way to visit us? You are not here just to chat right?”

“No, I’m just here to chat today.”

Kamyua Yost opened his eyes wide in surprise.

“I have always thought of the denizens of Forest's Edge as my own brethrens. But my feelings are one sided. To you all, I’m just an outsider of dubious origin. Of course, you won’t take my words on the rules of Forest's Edge and the depravity of the chief clan to heart. I’m here in order to deepen my friendship with you.”

Kamyua Yost took out a bottle of fruit wine from his cloak.

“It’s a little gift from me. Please try it tonight... Oh right, poison test.”

He took a sip of the fruit wine like he did the previous time.

“Hmm~I think you still haven’t answered my question properly. I don’t understand the reason and motive behind you getting closer to the denizens of Forest's Edge.”

“What? I just want to deepen my friendship with everyone, is there a need for motives and reasons...? If I have to think of one, it’s because the denizens of Forest's Edge were forced by circumstances in the past, and had to switch the god they worship. This resonates deeply with me. I respect how noble the denizens of Forest's Edge acts in the Post Station Town. I’m also intrigued and feel goodwill towards the two of you. My visit here is based on these three reasons.”

He had a way with words.

His thoughts were sound and orderly, but his expression and tone were frivolous.

“Since you agreed to host my visit, that means you are curious about me too right? After all, the people in town all fear the denizens of Forest's Edge, but I actually had the gall to come to Forest's Edge, so you couldn’t just ignore me right?”

“Thank you for articulating our thoughts... By the way, about the job you mentioned before, have you gotten permission from the Tsun clan?”

“Yes, I have reflected on my actions. If I skip the Tsun clan and contact the denizens of Forest's Edge directly, it would be a slight against the Tsun clan and cause unnecessary tension.”

This man's job was the escort of a caravan that would be leaving Genos for the Eastern Kingdom Semu.

When the time comes, the caravan hopes to travel through the Forest's Edge, so he had to ask the Tsun clan for a guide, and settle other related issues.

"Even though you had a run-in with the Tsun clan, they actually gave their permission so readily."

"Yes, even though I gave my name clearly, they accepted without any hesitation. As expected of the chief clan, even though they are corrupted, they are really magnanimous."

Kamyua Yost had a smile of satisfaction.

It might be bad for me to say this, but I couldn't trust him at all when he makes such a face.

"By the way, it will be quite some time before I set off for work. As it is a large caravan, the preparation work is tedious. And the members are very superstitious, so we will only set off on the 15th of the month. That would be twenty-odd days from today." I didn't know the calendar of this world yet, so even if I hear him say that, I still have no idea what date it was.

In order to not let him realize that, I nodded vaguely and said: "I see."

"When we set off for the eastern kingdom, it will take us two months to come back. That's why I hope to deepen my friendship with the two of you as much as possible in these 20 odd days. Ai Fa, Asuta, thank you for accepting a suspicious man like me."

"Our friendship aren't that deep."

"Solid friendships that are formed in no time are worthless. Only after going through a series of hardships will our friendship become sturdy."

It might sound like he was saying something profound, but it just sound superficial when it came out from his mouth.

When I was at a loss and moaning, my stomach suddenly growled.

Ai Fa was staring at Kamyua Yost, but she was now looking at me coldly.

“Are you hungry? If this is meal time, you don’t need to mind me.”

“No, we didn’t eat much during the day, I was just too busy last night to eat dinner...”

“That won’t do! You’re too skinny Asuta, you should eat more.”

This thin pole was actually telling me. Despite the retort I made in my heart, this man might only look exceptionally slender because he was too tall.

As he had a long cloak on, I couldn’t tell his body type, but the wrist he was showing looked solid. If I wasn’t wrong, his long fingers and big palms didn’t lose out to Jiza Wu and Darum Wu.

“It’s just past noon. Hmm... it’s too unbearable to hang on until evening with meat jerky alone. Ai Fa, can I cook some meat and aria?”

“Up to you.”

When I heard Ai Fa’s reply, I walked to the food store.

At this moment, the eyes of the guest sparkled, and he called out to me:

“Wait, is the meat you are talking about kiba meat? If I’m right, can you let me try some?”

Ai Fa had been calm all this while, but she now showed a shocked expression.

“You are from Rock City— but you want to eat kiba meat?”

“Hmm? Is that strange? Only the locals in Genos had the strange idea about fearing kiba and the denizens of Forest's Edge right?”

Kamyua Yost had a cheerful smile on his face.

“I’m not a local of Genos, or even this country. I think kiba is just a normal vermin, and the denizens of Forest's Edge are brave hunters that exterminate these vermins.

Travelers from the east and south don't fear you two right? Please don't be so surprised."

I couldn't tell the easterners from the southerners apart.

I only remember— most of the people who fear and view Ai Fa in contempt had yellowish skin.

"Aside from the denizens of Forest's Edge, no one else ate kiba. I don't know about the south or the east, but in the western territories, the kiba can only be found in the Morga Forest. As a citizen of the western kingdom, this will be a fulfilling trip if I can taste some kiba meat today."

His eyes were sparkling like a child

On the other hand, Ai Fa was clearly troubled.

In the last eight decades, denizens of Forest's Edge was viewed as 《Kiba Eaters》 , and seen in contempt. This development shocked Ai Fa deeply.

"Ai Fa, what should we do? You are the house head, I will follow your lead."

I bent over slightly and asked, then Ai Fa grabbed me by the chest suddenly.

I almost slipped, and Ai Fa leaned in so fast to me that I thought she wanted to bite my ears.

"I— I can't decide. What do you think, Asuta?"

We were so close together, but I could barely hear her voice.

She didn't want the guest to hear this.

I pulled away in surprise and was stunned when I saw Ai Fa's expression. Her icy expression was stiff, but her blue eyes were as childlike as Rimee Wu, and she looked at me uneasily.

She was that surprised by this.

Using my body as a shield, I blocked the guest from seeing her face and leaned near her ear:

“This wouldn’t violate any taboo in Forest's Edge, so it’s fine. Let’s treat him to kiba meat and aria as thanks for his fruit wine.”

Ai Fa grabbed my chest again and pulled me in.

“...Asuta, I will let you decide.”

Ai Fa’s lips touched my ear lobes, which made me blush.

I turned to the guest and nodded magnanimously in order to not let him see Ai Fa’s reaction.

“With the house head’s permission, I can cook you a simple meal. How large a portion should I prepare? This is to return the favour for the fruit wine, so you don’t need to hold back.”

“Then, I will have the same amount as you!”

He was acting like an old dog wagging its tail happily.

This might be a good chance. Eating the same food was a good way to get him to open up to us. I might be able to glimpse into the mind of this suspicious man. With that in mind, I headed into the food store.

During this time, Ai Fa had to face the rambling Kamyua Yost alone. She closed her eyes and didn’t make a sound.

Part 2

“Sorry for the wait.”

It was still early, so I had no intention of cooking anything tedious.

I cut the kiba belly meat into thin slices, then fried it together with sliced aria. After seasoning it with rock salt and pico leaves, I poured in fruit wine, and this simple meat fried with some vegetables was done.

“Asuta, you are skilled in cooking. Did you work as a chef in the city before?”

“Yes, that’s correct.”

I handed the spoon and plate to the guest.

The portion was about a quarter of the dinner.

As there wasn’t much, he should be able to finish them all even if it doesn’t suit his taste.

“Ara, I’m so happy. I often travel around the western territories, and at times needed to journey to the eastern and southern kingdom. But I have never seen a beast like the kiba. I have always been curious about its taste.”

So there aren’t anything like the kiba in this world. In my world, aside from the wild boars in the mountains, the other species had also gone extinct.

Ignoring that for now, let’s have a taste.

“I will help myself then.”

Kamyua Yost nodded and picked up the plate with a smile.

He scooped up the kiba meat and aria, then ate them.

Kamyua Yost chewed the food, his jaw covered in a scuffy beard moved up and down. He then swallowed the food—

Kamyua Yost’s narrow face suddenly went expressionless.

I was shocked, and almost let my spoon fall to the ground.

When Kamyua Yost stopped smiling, his casual face turned serious, like that of a death god or killer.

His brows rose high, his eyes sunken and his cheeks were thin, as if someone had cut off the meat on his face. I had never noticed such details, which filled me with fear.

Ai Fa was calm when I was preparing the meal, but she was staring at Kamyua Yost now, not missing a single shred of change.

During this time, Kamyua Yost picked up his spoon and kept sending the food into his mouth. The plate was empty in an instant.

When I saw how he was, I put down the spoon after eating one mouthful.

“...What is this?”

He opened his thin lipped mouth slightly, and said suddenly. This was the first time I found his voice to be so deep.

“Didn’t I already said, this is kiba.”

“That’s right. This is the first time I ate such a meat.”

He stared at me with his purple eyes.

His gaze was sharp.

“This is incredibly delicious.”

“I see. You flatter...”

“This is kiba meat?”

“Yes...”

“I have never tasted such a tasty meat before.”

“Guest! I’m sorry but you are making a scary face!”

“Eh? Really? Sorry!”

Kamyua Yost suddenly covered his thin face with his large palms.

“No no, I was too shocked and showed my hidden side! Don’t misunderstand, no matter which side you see, they are all the real me.”

I wouldn’t misunderstand, and I didn’t want to know either.

I thought we could know each other better by dining together, but I never imagined that it would make Kamyua Yost look more suspicious.

“Ara, this is really delicious! I’m really moved! The tribe in Forest’s Edge is actually monopolizing such tasty meat? How sly!”

Even though his hidden side was concealed again, he was still as suspicious as before.

I looked towards Ai Fa who was besides me, and she exhaled deeply.

When I saw her let go of the saber by her feet, I was shocked.

The man before us emitted such a dangerous air, it made Ai Fa grab her blade tensely.

“The people in Genos didn’t know how tasty the kiba is, and actually mocked the denizens of Forest’s Edge, calling them 《Kiba Eater》. How retarded! Are you monopolizing such tasty meat to get back at them?”

“No, no such thing.”

I answered, then picked up my spoon to eat a second mouthful.

At this moment, Ai Fa tapped my knee with her fist.

“Asuta, the aroma of the food made me a little hungry.”

“What? Didn’t I ask if you wanted some when I was cooking just now?”

I scooped up some meat and aria with my spoon.

“Here, open up.”

I was hit in the head.

Ai Fa snatched my plate, ate two mouthful, then returned the rest to me.

That was mean, house head.

“Yes, I’m really moved! Asuta, thanks to your exemplary culinary skills, the food taste so delicious. This dish is seasoned just right, and the fruit wine made it very appetizing. Asuta, did you learn under a famous chef?”

“No, my home was a small restaurant.”

“From which country? I have visited many nations, but I have never seen such a cooking style.”

I never thought this would come up.

No matter who it was, I wouldn’t change my stance.

“It will take some time to explain the entire thing. I come from an island nation called Japan. Before arriving in Forest's Edge, I had never heard of the continent Amusehorn before. When I came to one day, I found myself inside a forest, at the foot of Mount Morga.”

“...You had never heard of Amusehorn?”

Kamyua Yost opened his eyes wide in surprise again

That was a natural reaction. If a foreigner in Japan says he never heard of the country Japan before, I would feel surprised too.

“What do you mean? From your appearance, I thought you were a mixed blood of the east and west nations.”

“Hmm? Are mixed bloods from the east and west common?”

“No, they are rare, but the two nations are on friendly terms. If you choose which nation’s citizen to be from the very start, you won’t be prosecuted— Asuta, so you don’t even know such basic things?”

“Sorry, I don’t.”

We were busy recently, so Ai Fa’s lecture on the world of Amusehorn had stopped for now. After we would eat dinner, we would chat idly, and I would fall into slumber before I realized it.

By the way— Because the Forest's Edge settlement was a unique enclosed space, Ai Fa couldn’t possess extensive knowledge in such an environment. Ai Fa was merely regurgitating the information her parents and Grandma Jiba told her onto me.

“I see. So even though you are a foreigner, you decided to live on as a denizen of Forest's Edge. The people from the west think the denizens of Forest's Edge are incarnation of disaster, and the southerners brand them as the tribe of traitors that forsake their gods. The northerners are the forsaken rivals of the western people— That’s why I presumed that you hailed from the eastern kingdom.”

“My hometown was also called the far east island. Do the easterners look like me?”

“Not at all. The easterners also have black hair and eyes, but their skins are dark. You must have seen such people in the Post Station Town right? Those are the people from the Eastern Kingdom Simu.”

I see, my common sense wasn’t applicable on this land after all.

“I’m confused too, you can just think of me as a retard who believes in his strange delusion after hitting his head.”

“Got it, I will do just that.”

I didn’t expect that reply, and I almost fell over in surprise.

“Don’t misunderstand, I don’t think you are a retard. Hmm~ but I was still shocked, to think that kiba meat is so tasty... Word on the street of Genos is that kiba meat is stinky and tough, and unpalatable.”

“Someone must have tasted kiba that wasn’t prepared correctly, which led to such a rumour. Kiba is actually very delicious.”

“Yes! I could feel that point! Normally, only travellers will eat aria and poitan as their staple food, which led me to think that the denizens of Forest's Edge aren’t too

concerned with food, and live ascetically. This presumption was horribly wrong. The denizens of Forest's Edge aren't like that at all, it would not be arrogant to call yourselves the [Gourmet Tribe]. Yeah~ I'm so surprised."

"Ah, wait. Your impression of the Forest's Edge tribe isn't wrong. I'm a foreigner, you can't use me as the standard."

"Is that so? After eating such tasty kiba meat, I can't think of the denizens of Forest's Edge as pure-hearted and with little desire anymore. No wonder they can be satisfied with the cheap aria and poitan. Yeah~ this is so interesting!"

What should I do?

I didn't plan to tell everything about Forest's Edge to this suspicious character yet. But he was acquainted with the Count of Genos, so it didn't feel right to give him wrong information too.

"Kamyua Yost, sorry, but can you give me some time?"

"Hmm? What is it?"

"I came from a foreign country, and am not familiar with the taboos and customs of Forest's Edge. To be honest, I don't know if I should tell you about the situation inside Forest's Edge. I need to discuss with my house head about this."

"I see, no problem! After all, you are the only one talking to me, it will turn into my monologue if you keep quiet...! Alright then, I will leave for a moment. Actually, my scouting work isn't finished yet, I want to take a visit to the south."

"South... That's where the Wu village is."

"I won't go near the Wu clan today. They don't seem to welcome me, and I realized that I should be careful when I interact with the denizens of Forest's Edge."

He actually had such a thought, looked like Darum Wu drawing his blade on him wasn't a complete waste of effort.

But I hoped he would have realized that before the blade was drawn.

"But from the terrain, you will definitely pass through the Wu village if you head south. This is an elongated settlement after all, and there is only one path."

“Don’t worry, I’m good at concealing myself. I hid myself pretty well last night too right?”

“...What?”

“I hid in a corner of the woods and watched that banquet quietly. When the young men from the Tsun clan showed up, I broke out in cold sweat. Fortunately, everything ended peacefully.”

Kamyua Yost gave a big casual smile after leaving with these words.

Part 3

"I want to ask your opinion about that uncle?"

I asked Ai Fa as I boiled the poitan soup.

"When I talked in depth with him, I found him hard to grasp. Maybe we should stop getting involved with him?"

"...I don't know."

Ai Fa sounded tired.

"I have no intentions of mingling with the citizens of Rock City in the first place, but what that man said is right. Even though his attitude is so frivolous."

"Which is to say, everything will be much easier if we can trust him... Although that guy and Jiza Wu are always smiling, their personalities are miles apart. I might not see eye to eye with Jiza Wu, but I know how serious he is."

"And he— ate the kiba meat."

Ai Fa muttered, her eyes gloomy.

"That surprised me the most. I thought no one from Rock City would ever do that."

"I see. I'm not born in Forest's Edge, and had only visited the Post Station Town once. But I agree with him on that point."

"...What do you mean?"

"Ehh? My thinking is similar to that uncle, that only people who are from Genos would believe the superstition that kiba and the kiba hunters are signs of disaster. Genos' farm is often attacked by kiba, so the locals would naturally have skewed views about kiba and have misunderstandings. But the other people don't think much about kiba, and so they don't fear them. Furthermore, it had been decades since the locals think of kiba as a sign of disaster."

"....."

“Almost all the stalls in the Post Station Town are operated by the Genos locals, so when the denizens of Forest's Edge go there, they will basically come into contact with people that fear them. If there are more foreigners setting up stalls in the Post Station Town, and they don't mind the aura of the Forest's Edge denizens and their preference to keep to themselves like that uncle, maybe there won't be such a misunderstanding.”

“...Asuta, you are saying difficult things.”

Ai Fa couldn't help saying in frustration.

That dignified Ai Fa actually said that.

“Even if you are not from Genos, you must be from Rock City. Your words are as unfathomable as Kamyua Yost.”

“Compared to Forest's Edge, my birth place is indeed more similar to the Post Station Town. However, even if the topic I'm talking about is difficult, you can't give up on understanding each other—”

“You think I'm not putting in effort?”

Ai Fa's weak voice surprised me, and I turned back.

She leaned against the wall near the stove, her expression looked unexpectedly and her eyelids were half closed.

“I don't really understand you, but I still tried my best to do so. Are you blaming me because I understand too slowly...?”

“N-No, that's not it! It's my fault! Please don't cry!”

“Who's crying! Who did you think I am!?”

Ai Fa was saying things that was supposed to be my lines, and her face was blushed.

Instead of being on the verge of tears, this expression suited her better.

“Let's decide on the steps first. How much of the truth should we tell that uncle? What must we tell him? What can't we tell him? We need to decide carefully.”

“I understand.”

After Ai Fa said that, she stood up slowly for some reason and went behind me as I continued cooking the poitan.

While I was wondering what happened, she placed her hands on my shoulders and whispered into my ears: “Asuta, what do you think?”

As I was a little taller, she had probably straightened her back. Although she only touched my shoulders, I could feel Ai Fa’s body warmth on my back faintly.

“W-Wait! We already chased away that uncle, why do we have to whisper?”

“We can’t be sure that man has really left. He might be eavesdropping outside.”

Even if that was true, did she plan to stick close to me for the next few hours?

“W-Wait! The poitan has dried up, let me deal with that first.”

I felt the body warmth fade away quickly.

Really, her actions were more unnerving than Vena Wu.

I shifted the dissolved poitan onto a fake rubber tree leaf folded into a boat shape, and quietly wiped the sweat on my brow.

There were six poitan, or enough for three portions.

Kamyua Yost would be back before sunset, he suggested that we should dine together.

“I won’t ask to stay the night! But I’m very intrigued by the food culture in Forest’s Edge! I’m willing to pay!”

I have no intention of soliciting payment from the guest that brought high class fruit wine as a door gift. Ai Fa showed a complicated expression, but she still acceded to his request. That was why I’m preparing dinner for three.

“Before our secret talk, let’s decide our dinner.”

I used a spatula to scrape away the charred remnants of the poitan, and turned to Ai Fa who had retreated behind me.

“What should we have for dinner?” “Hamburg steak.”

That was fast!

When she saw my stunned face, Ai Fa said again: “...Hamburg steak.”

You didn’t need to repeat that

“I see. On second thought, we need to consider our dinner carefully.”

Ai Fa walked over briskly, grabbed my neck so our heads were at the same level, then asked softly:

“What do you mean?”

She was actually serious?

“We shouldn’t let him think that the hamburg steak is a normal dish in Forest’s Edge right? If we need to explain this dish, it will bring up our relationship to the Wu clan and Lutim house. We should decide what information we should make public first.”

I had to whisper to Ai Fa too. We were extremely close, and no matter how hard I tried to hold my breath, the fragrance still snuck into my nose. I just ate, but Ai Fa’s scent stirred my appetite again.

Ai Fa didn’t realize how I was feeling at all, her lips went near my ears again..

“...Why?”

“Hey, since we aren’t saying anything important, there’s no need to whisper right!?”

“That’s true.”

Even though she answered that way, Ai Fa still leaned in with her ear.

I still need to whisper after all.

“Well, that uncle has a special status, he knows the Landlord of Genos right? If we gave him wrong information, it might lead to misunderstandings. Furthermore, he isn’t on good terms with the Tsun clan, so it’s inappropriate to tell him too much about the Wu clan and Lutim house right?”

“...That man already met Donda Wu, and knows that we are involved with that banquet right?”

Ai Fa whispered.

My right ear lobes felt as it was melting.

“That’s true. The important thing is... Given the chance, Donda Wu will bring down the Tsun clan. Can we say this to that man?”

A question worth pondering over.

I exhausted too much stamina, so I sat on the ground and poked at the aria that was waiting for its moment to debut.

“That man—”

“Uwah!”

“What is it retard, that scared me.”

“Y-You are the one scaring me, retard! Don’t whisper to me so suddenly from behind!”

“...You can’t even notice this much movement?”

“Regrettably, I’m not a hunter, and my senses are not that incredible! When you approach me, please do so from my field of vision!”

“What a naggy man...”

Ai Fa said unhappily, then squatted before me.

She grabbed my chin, turned my face to the side and leaned in.

“Since that man might approach Donda Wu in the future, hiding the truth won’t be of much help... But we are not obligated to feed him the information either.”

I finally realized that I had nowhere to run.
The gods must be trying to test my reason and humanity.

This was too troubling.

“I get it. Let’s tidy our thoughts. Ai Fa, what information do you think we can’t tell that man?”

Ai Fa groaned again.

Her face was 10 cm away, if one of us were to move, our knees would touch.

I couldn’t stay calm at all.

Ai Fa finally raised her head. I turned my face to the side in a panic, and she caressed my ears with her gentle whispers

“...Nothing.”

“You actually have nothing!”

I almost whacked Ai Fa’s head on reflex.

In such a close distance, Ai Fa pouted as if she was throwing a fit.

“You are the one who suggested this secret talk, so you have something in mind right? Just tell me what you think.”

She turned her head away hard.

Strange, my fatigue was comparable to the huge project I undertook yesterday.

“You think the Tsun clan is the disgrace of Forest's Edge, but you can’t stand the people in the city criticizing them. Then— if that uncle punished Doddo Tsun and the others for their crimes, would he become an enemy of Forest's Edge?”

Ai Fa frowned troublingly.

She didn't lower her voice as she answered:

"If the Tsun clan violates the laws in the city and gets punished, then it is their fault. And naturally, the people in the city won't become our enemy... However, if the people in the city try to pin a crime on them by saying they [violated the rules of Forest's Edge], that would be humiliating to us. If the people in the city mess with the denizens of Forest's Edge that way, I would think the entire thing is a scam."

I see. It was a bit hard to understand what she said, but the gist was that when the denizens of Forest's Edge violate the laws in the city, they should be judged by the people in the city. But if their crimes were breaking the rules of Forest's Edge, their sentences should be meted out by the denizens of Forest's Edge.

"Hmm~... but the Tsun clan keeps breaking the rules in Forest's Edge right? No one in Forest's Edge are holding them to task right?"

"What are you saying, I have never turned a blind eye to the Tsun clan's wrongdoing."

"I know. I think you are incredible... But not everyone in Forest's Edge is like you, and dares to defy the Tsun clan right? When the Tsun clan came to pick a fight yesterday, everyone could only sit by and endure the Tsun clan's tyrannical ways until Donda Wu and Dan Lutim took action."

"Without permission from the house head, no one can defy the Tsun clan wilfully. Since I am the house head, I can do what I wish."

"What I'm about to ask might sound unpleasant... Do the smaller houses not related to the Wu clan have any choice other than suffer the Tsun clan's violence quietly?"

Ai Fa bit her lower lips, raised her head and said while staring at me:

"Tsun clan is the chief clan, but if they openly commit such violent acts, the people will definitely lean towards the Wu clan. In order to prevent that, those retards will still restrain themselves."

"Since they can't do it openly, they will be discreet about it."

"....."

“Ai Fa, you are strong. When Diddo Tsun and Doddo Tsun do bad things, you can punish them. But those not as strong as you can only suffer in silence— when I think about this, I still can’t forgive them.”

“...My prowess are limited, so I can only stop the violence I can see with my eyes.”

Ai Fa grabbed my chest again.

Her actions weren’t violent, and she seemed to be leaning into me instead.

“I can only protect myself, that’s why...”

That was why she always lived alone.

That was why I might become a burden to her.

I nodded, and held Ai Fa’s hand that was at my chest.

“I’m sorry, I wasn’t blaming you. No one could accept such violent behaviour. That’s why the Wu clan and house Lutim are so mad... By the way, is the Tsun clan really that powerful? Since they are on par with the Wu clan, that means they have close to a hundred kinsman, and all of them follow the Tsun clan’s lead right?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know all of the Tsun clan’s kin house.”

“I see... Those kin house isn’t as depraved as the Tsun clan right?”

“I have no idea... But if all one hundred of the Tsun clan’s kin were neglecting their hunting duties, then the kiba would already have overrun the entire forest.”

“That’s true. If a hundred of the five hundred denizens of Forest’s Edge lived a depraved life, that would be—”

I remembered something I heard before in mid sentence.

“...Now that you mentioned it, Ludo Wu told me,[There’s way too many kiba.] Kiba are normally solitary, but three of them suddenly attacked the hunters at the same time, resulting in Shin Wu’s father suffering a serious leg injury. He also asked me how the Fa house’s forest is doing...”

Ai Fa still held onto my chest, her expression turned serious.

“Asuta, I already mentioned this the next day after I met you.”

“Ehh?”

“You asked me, [Forest's Edge denizens hunts kiba everyday, won't the kiba go extinct?] But then, I answered you that the kiba's population won't go down, and has been increasing instead.”

“.....”

“The number of kiba is increasing. It's the hunting season for kiba, but the numbers are still incredible... To be honest, with that many kiba lurking in the forest, I don't even need to use the fruits that attracts kiba.”

“Eh? Ai Fa, you are not using [sacrificial hunting style]?”

“Not for these past few days. Despite that, I still caught a kiba every other day.”

“I see. Hmm, that's strange? So that fragrance isn't from the fruit that attracts kiba?”

Ai Fa immediately blushed, and she put more strength into the fingers on my chest.

“When the fruit that attracts kiba get into my hair, it's hard to get rid of it! Asuta, I have told you to not joke around with my body scent!”

“No, I'm praising you...”

“Shut up...! Anyways, the number of kiba has been increasing through the years.”

“Okay. Ludo Wu wasn't sure of it, but he thought that was the case.”

“...The Wu village is to our south. The Tsun clan is to the north.”

Ai Fa's cheeks were still a little red, and there were hints of fire in her eyes.

“You might not understand the relationship between the terrain and kiba. If the Tsun clan continues to neglect their work as hunters, the north of Forest's Edge will be affected the worst.”

“...Ai Fa, you think the number of kiba’s are increasing too?”

Maybe— the situation is already much more serious than I imagined.

Leaving my insignificant sense of moral and justice aside, if everyone continues to turn a blind eye to the Tsun clan’s depraved actions, the meaning behind the existence for the denizens of Forest's Edge— might be gone?

“...Ai Fa, this matter might be beyond our capability. Kamyua should build a relationship with the Wu clan or Lutim house, and not us right?”

“There’s no point in doing that.”

“Huh? But why?”

“Think about Donda Wu’s temperament. If the Tsun clan’s depravity goes beyond their limit, he won’t hesitate in using force to settle things. He will uphold the order in Forest’s Edge, and won’t depend on Rock City— I can understand where he is coming from.”

Ai Fa sighed, and seemed completely different from her usual self.

“Because I know how he feels, I don’t want to ignite this dispute. If the Wu clan and Tsun clan start a war with all their kin, we will lose many good hunters, and the order in Forest's Edge would be on the brink of collapse.”

“Even if it comes to that, you still don’t want to depend on Rock City...”

I sighed too.

With how dangerous the situation was getting, Ai Fa and I met someone who was acquainted with the highest authority in Rock City.

There were only two members in the Fa house. Just what kind of burden did the gods or demons want us to bear?

As a weak hearted caretaker, the most I could do was mince the meat for the house head and guest.

Part 4

“Hi, sorry for being late.”

When the guest sauntered back into our house, the sun was just touching the western edge of the forest.

“Even though there are just five hundred denizens, this settlement is incredibly vast. This is my second time visiting Forest's Edge, and I still couldn't grasp the scale of it all.”

“Do you need to do that?”

“Hmm, well, the scope of my job is vast too.”

A few hours had passed, but Kamyua Yost was still very suspicious.

“Speaking of which, this smells really nice! Luckily, I restrained myself and didn't eat any jerky! Ah, here's my blade for your safekeeping.”

“This way please. I just finished preparing the food.”

I didn't plan to disrupt my routine for the guest. If Kamyua Yost didn't return in time, we would have started without him.

When I saw him return right before we were about to dine, I was worried he was eavesdropping outside just like what Ai Fa said.

It was fine for him to hear what we said, but I wouldn't be able to take it if he saw how pained I was because of Ai Fa's unintentional body contacts.

“Uwah, impressive! Why did the kiba turn into this round shape?”

“I minced the meat and moulded it into this round shape.”

“I see. Why did you bother to do that?”

“Because it tastes better this way.”

It seemed that dishes similar to hamburg steak didn't exist in this world.

Or maybe this uncle didn't know about it.

"Anyway, let's dig in. We're hungry."

"Yes, let's eat."

I decided not to rack my brain over the menu, and let the guest eat a classic meal of the Fa house.

Which was the three following dishes: kiba hamburg steak, fried aria with tino and grilled poitan.

I hoped to get a new pot soon, so I could prepare one more soup dish.

"Hmm? Is this fuwano? I heard that the staple food in Forest's Edge is poitan."

"That is poitan. What's a fuwano?"

"The wrapped meat bun that Tara was eating back then. Westerners normally eat fuwano together with meat and vegetables— Eh? This is poitan? Why? How can this be poitan?"

It seems like this way of eating poitan had not been invented outside Forest's Edge yet.

His reaction intrigued me, so I leaned forward.

"Can you tell me how the people in the city eat poitan?"

"No one in the city eats poitan. Poitan is normally packed for travels. Unlike fuwano, poitan could be preserved for a long time, and eaten right after cooking. It is cheap and suitable for long journeys... The only downside is its unappealing taste."

"That's regrettable."

After I answered, Ai Fa tugged the corner of my t-shirt. She must be reaching the limits of her hunger.

“Please enjoy your meal. I hope you won’t show your hidden side again.”

“I will do that... ! I will help myself then.”

“Rub a dub dub, thanks for the grub.”

“.....”

The three of us got in place and picked up our plates.

I minced a mountain of hamburg steak just yesterday, but it’s been awhile since I tasted one. After grilling so many hamburg steak, I felt that my control over the heat had gotten better, which made me gleeful.

The hamburg steak today was huge, almost 500g. Eating the meat, which was beaten and then cooked in the fruit wine, made the juices come out with just a bite, stimulating my mouth comfortably.

When I chewed, the taste of the meat and fats spreaded throughout my mouth— Ah, kiba meat was really suited to be made into hamburg steak. I realized this once again.

The seared surface and the tenderness inside had an adequate balance. After eating a large amount of hamburg steak, the mini hamburg steak couldn’t satisfy me now.

The aria side dish had the texture of onions, and the tino was like cabbage. Both of them complemented the meat really well. Tino would spoil within a few days and couldn’t be kept for long like aria and poitan, so we should consume them as soon as possible.

Well then—

I lifted my head to observe the guest dining, and fortunately, he didn’t show a death god-like face this time.

But his face was wavering, as if he was on the verge of tears.



I didn't want to interact with him right now, but I still asked out of politeness: "Is the food alright?"

"It's great."

He asked in a teary voice.

"I'm working hard to keep my composure. How's that? I look fine, right?"

"I don't know what your standard for [fine] is, but at least you don't look scary."

"I see. That's great."

Kamyua Yost took a bite of the grilled poitan.

His expression went blank the next instant. I almost screamed in surprise.

"Didn't I tell you that's scary!? What is it? Are you trying to joke here?"

"I didn't mean to do that. You are the one who surprised me."

His voice was heavy, which made me feel that his next words would be: "And so, I have to kill you."

Is this uncle really fine?

Ai Fa didn't care about the faces Kamyua Yost was showing, and kept eating her hamburg steak.

Someone not from Forest's Edge daring to eat kiba meat should make Ai Fa uneasy, but she showed no signs of wavering at all— no, she was probably just lost in her world of the hamburg steak.

I didn't know if it was just my imagination, but compared to kiba steak or kiba soup, Ai Fa looked exceptionally blissed when she eats hamburg steak. If I didn't plan the menu properly, she would probably eat hamburg steak everyday, how scary.

But I still— felt really happy.

The women of the Wu clan and Lutim house must be feeling the same bliss too.

Aside from Ludo Wu, the men of the Wu clan didn't really care about me. But their family must understand the inner world of that group of crude men acutely.

I hope my guess was right.

"Hey, this is too good! What a delicious and unique taste! Asuta, just who are you?"

After finishing his meal, Kamyua Yost finally reverted back to his unpredictable mode, and said:

"I have never tasted such an incredible food! You mentioned that you minced the meat, then moulded them into a round patty again? How did you come up with such an interesting way of cooking it?"

"I don't know. This is a common cooking method in my home country."

A few centuries ago, the horse meat in mongolia was really tough, so the people minced them before cooking them. This was said to be the origins of the hamburg steak. I didn't remember the details, and this information probably didn't exist in this world either.

"Hmm~ What a delicious and impactful taste. This is the first time I have eaten such a delicacy."

"You are exaggerating. Haven't you dined with the Lord Count in Rock City before?"

"Those are the food for the nobles. It might be unique and interesting, but I couldn't tell if it tasted good... However, your cooking is definitely delicious."

《Whirlwind of the North》 Kamyua Yost crossed his arms and heaped on praises.

He was exaggerating a little, but it wasn't annoying.

"Asuta. I think whether something is delicious is not decided by the taste alone."

"Eh? Yes, that's true."

"I heard kiba meat is tough and stinky, but I never thought it would be this tender and tasty. And the mud water like poitan got turned into the shape of a fuwano. Finally, you only used aria and tino, but the meal is so delicious— these are all details that made the dish more delectable."

“I see.”

“If these dishes were served in the castle, I would just think [Oh, what a unique dish], [It must be expensive] and would be not as surprised. If one is willing to pay, it is only natural for them to serve up dishes that are hard to make. However, the ingredients here are kiba, along with aria and poitan, two ingredients people thought to be cheap and unappetizing. That really surprises me!”

“Huh? Everyone thinks aria is cheap and unappetizing?”

“Hmm? No, people in the city often eat aria. After all, aria is cheap and nutritious, so aria and fuwano are the staple food of the citizens. Aria can’t be found in the castle town though. The residents there think such cheap vegetables are a sign of poverty, so aria became the staple food of the Post Station Town and farmers.”

“I see, so aria is a staple food of the peasants, and the nobles won’t eat them.”

“That’s right. But, leaving my surprise aside, your cooking is still delicious. Asuta, the people in Forest’s Edge let you cook for the huge banquet because of your outstanding culinary skills right?”

He suddenly started an important topic.

I was very curious about the topic of food this strange man had brought up, but now wasn’t the time for such idle chatter.

“Sorry, but I forgot to ask you. Why did you peek at the Lutim house banquet last night? To be honest, that is a really low move.”

“My bad my bad, I couldn’t suppress my curiosity. As you know, when I met you in the Wu village, the plaza was set up for a banquet. As you said that you are busy with a job two days later, I presumed that there will be a festive event on that day. Hence, I sneaked into Forest’s Edge two days later.”

“I don’t know if your action is considered a crime or not, but where did you hide?”

“In the woods right in front of the plaza. I know it wasn’t appropriate of me to enter the plaza... But I never expected those scums were braver than me, and barged right in.”

“...You knew they are from the Tsun clan because Doddo Tsun was with them?”

“Yes. I learned that you cooked the food for the banquet after hearing your conversation.”

I held my breath.

In that case— He must have heard Dan Lutim and Donda Wu’s angry roar.

I couldn’t hide too much from him now.

“Speaking of which, Ai Fa looked really stunning back then! I have no complaints with her attire right now, but she will only dress up like that for banquets right?”

Ai Fa tilted her head slightly, as if she was asking: “Do I need to answer?”

She was starting to understand how she should deal with the man before her.

Her heart must be filled with doubt and confusion when she heard that man praise the kiba meat repeatedly, but she looked calm on the surface.

On the other hand I was— still groping.

No matter how hard I tried to understand this man’s thoughts, he kept slipping away like an eel. It would probably take quite some time to understand him.

However—

“Alright then, I should take my leave.”

When I saw Kamyua Yost preparing to stand, I almost fell onto the ground while seated.

“Y-You are going back?”

“Yes. Didn’t you say that the denizens of Forest’s Edge will sleep early after dinner? I’m a night owl, and I would feel bad about making you stay up with me.”

“Kamyua Yost... why exactly are you here?”

“I already said right at the start. I’m here to deepen my friendship with the two of you.”

This was bad.

As expected, I didn’t understand him at all.

I wanted to use this man’s strength and position to stop the Tsun clan from falling deeper, and in turn protect the safety of Ai Fa and me. But I couldn’t see through his thoughts at all— his thoughts were too liberal.

I should wipe the existence of the man from my mind.

“Oh right, I have one last thing to discuss, or rather, suggest to you.”

“What is it?”

I answered disinterestedly.

He probably wanted to say something inconsequential. If he talks some rubbish, I will use this chance to break off all ties with him— Even though I harboured such a thought, his madness far exceeded my imagination.

“Would you like to open a stall in the Post Station Town?”

At the very end, he said these shocking words.

Chapter 2

The Day of Decision

Part 1

The next day after we met Kamyua Yost, Ai Fa and I visited the Lutim village early in the morning.

To be honest, Ai Fa and I couldn't handle that madman by ourselves anymore.

After heading to the south of the Wu village, we found five large houses grouped tightly together. This was the Lutim village, and I had visited this place several times before the wedding to consult the newlywed's opinions.

Fortunately, Kaslan Lutim was already up when we visited the massive main house.

"Hey, it's Ai Fa and Asuta. What's the matter?"

Kaslan Lutim received us with a smile.

The house head Dan Lutim was still fast asleep. But that was fine since Kaslan Lutim was the one with an earnest character, and a flexible, open mind. We needed to consult him now.

"Sorry for visiting at such a time."

"It's fine, the custom of the Lutim house dictates that husband and wife don't need to work three days before and after the wedding. I'm very happy about your visit."

Kaslan Lutim had a calm smile.

Even so, I still felt guilty about visiting the groom two days after his wedding.

But we were very confused and had to seek the opinion of a third party.

“Yesterday, when Kamyua Yost visited the Fa house, our conversation developed in an unexpected manner.”

When Kaslan Lutim brought me into a large hall that was on par with the Wu clan in terms of size, I started the topic.

What we wanted to discuss was the insane idea proposed by Kamyua Yost last night.



“Why do we have to open a stall in the Post Station Town?”

When I answered in a panic, Kamyua Yost didn’t seem bothered at all.

“For the sake of making the denizens of Forest's Edge stronger and more prosperous of course.”

I sighed, then scratched my head on reflex.

“If I open a stall, why would the denizens of Forest's Edge obtain more strength and become more prosperous? I don’t get the logic behind your words.”

“Why? Asuta, you might have come from a foreign land, but you are now a member of Forest's Edge. When you become wealthy, that means life in Forest's Edge will be more prosperous too, right?”

“Don’t think so. The earned copper plates will only make the Fa house richer. Furthermore, there are only the two of us in the Fa house, with no other kin or family. No one will share our gains.”

“Hmm? What do you mean?”

I started explaining to the uncle that the denizens of Forest's Edge was a tribe that deepened their bonds through blood ties.

He probably knew, but I still told him that “commerce” didn’t exist in Forest's Edge. And so, money would stay within relatives.

Still, there was a faint smile on Kamyua Yost’s face.

"I can't agree with that. Going by what you said, the denizens of Forest's Edge don't care about anyone except their family. What I mean is, do you think everyone but your family is insignificant?"

"That's going too extreme. Of course we have friends too. But even if we become wealthy, it will have nothing to do with their lives."

"That's only if you hog all the wealth like the chief clan."

At this point of the conversation, Ai Fa had completely showed her hunter's eyes.

That was a natural reaction. I wasn't angry yet, but my distrust of this uncle had been pushed to the limits.

"I'm just chatting about something that flashed across my mind, I never thought you would be so resistant against it."

"...Of course. Even for idle chatter, that came out of nowhere."

"Is it? I think this sudden inspiration isn't bad at all. After all, opening a stall in the Post Station Town isn't that hard."

Kamyua Yost said casually. He was about to get up, but he sat back down and stroked his stubby beard.

"I got it. I will explain to you from the very beginning. The first thing on my mind is the value of the kiba meat."

"...The value of the kiba meat?"

"The people in Forest's Edge sell kiba horns, tusks, and hides in exchange for food. In that case, why not sell kiba meat?"

"The people in the city don't eat kiba meat, right? They fear the kiba, and even mock the Forest's Edge denizens as 《Kiba Eaters》."

"Only the locals in Genos fear kiba. The travellers and migrants are just influenced by them."

“No, that might be so—”

“Let me ask you, do you think it is right for the people in Genos to discriminate Forest's Edge denizens as 《Kiba Eaters》 and fear them? Will that make the denizens of Forest's Edge happy and proud? If the denizens of Forest's Edge don't mind, then it's okay. I can understand why you don't want the people in the city to know how delicious the kiba are. You are free to ignore my proposal... But if that isn't what the denizens of Forest's Edge really think, I really can't imagine a reason why you won't sell the kiba meat.”

The denizens of Forest's Edge discovered the delectability of kiba only recently, in this very month— There wasn't any point for me to rebuke him like this.

Since we could peddle kiba tusks and horns, there wasn't any reason why we couldn't sell kiba meat.

“You want me to open a butcher shop in the Post Station Town? Is that really profitable?”

“You won't earn money in the Post Station Town if you start with a butchery right off the bat. We need to let them know how tasty kiba meat is. That's why I suggested for you to open a stall... Not a butchery, but a food stall.”

“.....”

“If you succeed, the kiba meat could then be sold as merchandize. Everyone thinks that kiba meat is nasty and stinks, but if your delicious food becomes popular in the Post Station Town, you can overturn this misconception. When everyone will be willing to pay for kiba meat with copper plates, your success will lift up Forest's Edge, right?”

Kamyua Yost looked really chirpy, as if he just wanted to chat.

“The tusks and horns from one kiba could be exchanged for at most one silver plate. The hide goes for about the same amount. The hunters in Forest's Edge risk their lives to hunt, so this pittance is too unreasonable... I found this unsettling since a long time ago.”

“However— the denizens of Forest's Edge lived for eight decades this way. If we

destroy this pattern now—”

“Asuta, what I’m going to say might be a little rude. You just became a denizen of Forest's Edge, right? I asked my friends in the Post Station Town, they have never seen a foreigner in Forest's Edge clothing in the past.”

“...And so?”

“I just want to tell you that I might be more familiar with life in Forest's Edge than you.”

Kamyua Yost had an arrogant smile.

“There are plenty of hunter’s pride hanging on Ai Fa’s neck. The Wu clan has many kin, and there’s also the Tsun clan hogging all the prize money... Asuta, have you ever interacted with the other houses before?”

No.

Why did Kamyua Yost ask that?

“The answer is simple. When you know what kind of life the average denizens of Forest's Edge are living, you won’t be against the idea of improving their lives.”

“The average— Forest's Edge denizen? You are not even a denizen of Forest's Edge, how would you know—”

“I’m not a denizen, so this is just my guess. If I’m wrong, I hope Ai Fa will correct me.”

Ai Fa didn’t say a word.

However— I sensed another agitated emotion other than rage in her fiery eyes.

“Most of the Forest's Edge denizens only eat aria and poitan because they couldn’t afford other ingredients. Only a minority of the Forest's Edge denizens has as much savings as Ai Fa, most of them are suffering in poverty. Their homes are empty, and not because they wish for an ascetic lifestyle. Many couldn’t afford aria and poitan, and couldn’t eat anything except kiba meat, leading to a premature death— That’s my assumption. From the information I garnered in the Post Station Town, and inspecting Forest's Edge personally, that’s the conclusion I arrived at. Ai Fa, am I wrong?”

“...The capable houses lead wealthy lives, and the powerless families lead impoverished lives. That is just the way things are.”

“Which means, there really are people who only live by eating meat in Forest's Edge, and die prematurely. There are even those who fail to hunt kiba and starve to death. Is that true?”

“...To avoid being forced to such an end, we have to work hard and become stronger. That's what I have been taught since young.”

“Since the denizens of Forest's Edge teach their children this concept, that means such a risk exists.”

Why did things end up like this?

I started deluding— that compared to Ai Fa who seldom mingled with the other denizens, Kamyua Yost from the city understood the situation in Forest's Edge better.

“Outsiders have a clearer view.”

Kamyua Yost smiled again, but his expression changed this time.

He narrowed his drooping eyes, and a clear light appeared in his purple iris, like an elderly philosopher— Even though he was clearly suspicious, his eyes were as intelligent as Grandma Jiba's.

“The denizens of Forest's Edge live a honest life... If the kiba gets hungry, it would charge out of the forest and destroy the farmlands of the Genos. To keep the kiba from starving, the people in Forest's Edge are not allowed to forage food from the forest. As a mere man, I couldn't understand why they would rather starve to death than violate such an unfair agreement. Not just that, the kiba that the denizens of Forest's Edge risked their lives to hunt is only worth a silver plate or two. I don't agree to such a way of living. I think the people in Forest's Edge should have a more prosperous life.”

“But... Excessive wealth will make one depraved. Just like the Tsun clan...”

“Their wealth was obtained by unjust means without any effort. I don't think Ai Fa and Donda Wu would become depraved because of wealth. Even if the necklace on Ai Fa's

neck increases by a hundred, she won't give up on being a hunter, right?"

Ai Fa— she definitely won't give up.

It was the same for Donda Wu.

The Wu clan would hunt large numbers of kiba everyday, but they would just use the copper plates to buy vegetables or accessories for their daughters. They won't squander any of it, or neglect their hunter's work. They spent all their time hunting kiba and felt proud about that.

The figure of Shin Wu appeared in my mind.

That youth had to support five family members.

And of course, they wouldn't starve if he could rely on the other kin in his village. But for the sake of protecting his family, he would go as far as to adopt the dangerous [sacrificial hunting style].

If instead of being from the Wu clan, he would be like Ai Fa and come from a family with few blood kins— he would need to hunt a little more than one kiba every two days to provide enough aria and poitan for his family.

"What do you think? My opinion is that the people in Forest's Edge should live with more abundance. Do you believe that is unreasonable?"

"...From what I have seen, I don't think the denizens of Forest's Edge are living a life of misfortune."

I have met the women of Forest's Edge at the water source before, and also saw small groups of men heading into the woods. Even though I never mingled with the other houses, I often saw them walking around Forest's Edge. Their eyes were clear and bright, although not to the extent of the Wu clan.

They might be poor and discriminated in the city, but they didn't seem to be living a life of misfortune.

"I agree with you. The denizens of Forest's Edge are a tribe that keeps to themselves... That is why I hope they can live a more prosperous life."

Kamyua Yost closed his eyes, concealing his unfathomable gaze.

When he opened his eyes again, he smiled casually again.

“I’m just sharing what I thought on a whim. I will let the two of you judge the rest. Only the denizens of Forest’s Edge can decide the future of Forest’s Edge. Please choose a path you think is right, and strive forth.”

“...Are you still insisting this is something you just thought up?”

Agitated emotions came over me, and I glared at Kamyua Yost’s unfathomable face.

“After knowing I was the chef for yesterday’s banquet— you requested to have dinner at my place in order to ascertain my cooking skills?”

“You flatter me, I’m not that brilliant... However, when I saw the blissful faces of everyone feasting on the kiba, I was confused. Since kiba is so delicious, why don’t they sell meat along with the tusks and horns?”

Kamyua Yost mentioned casually.

My head was a mess.

It was probably the same for Ai Fa.

This man— just who was he?

“Asuta, after dining with you, I’m certain that your cooking will sell in the Post Station Town. But what I think isn’t important. The crucial thing is, which path is the right one for the denizens of Forest’s Edge?”

Kamyua Yost stood up briskly, his cloak rustling in the air.

“It is your freedom to choose whichever path you like. If you wish to discuss further details, you are welcome to visit me anytime. I will be staying in the 《Kimyusu’s Tail Inn》 until the 15th of next month. I will also visit you when I come to Forest’s Edge to scout again— only if you still welcome me.”



Kaslan Lutim remained calm the entire time, and didn't interject at all before I finished.

At the very end, he commented—"What a surprise".

"No one from the city ever interacted with the people of Forest's Edge in such a way before. How surprising."

Ema Min Lutim had excused herself, so only the three of us were left in the room.

I leaned forth and asked:

"What do you think? After listening to Kamyua Yost's words, what should we do?"

"That will depends on what you think. If you want to know my views—"

This is too retarded... If Kaslan Lutim were to answer like this, Ai Fa and I might have an easier time.

But reality was cruel.

"— I think his proposal makes a lot of sense."

Kaslan Lutim said with certainty.

"I see..."

"Yes. It's not against the rules to exchange kiba meat for copper plates. If we plan to do so, the residents in the Post Station Town have to taste the kiba meat first. Regarding a prosperous life for the denizens of Forest's Edge— I concur with that man's opinion."

Kaslan Lutim showed no hesitation in his eyes.

If Kamyua Yost would have had these eyes, I might have agreed to his proposal without any hesitation.

This couldn't be helped. Leaving aside the fact that everyone has different personalities, Kaslan Lutim was a denizen of Forest's Edge, while Kamyua Yost was from Rock City, their background was drastically different.

“Excessive wealth will make people depraved— That’s how I feel. Do the denizens of Forest's Edge think this is an insult?”

“No. After all, you already know about the depraved Tsun clan, so having such thoughts is unavoidable. However, this is similar to hamburg steak, right?”

“H-Hamburg steak?”

“That’s right. Those who are not disciplined will be obsessed with the taste of hamburg steak, and allow their teeth and jaw to turn weak. Medicine will become poison if taken in excess. In my eyes, excessive wealth is the same thing.”

Kaslan Lutim smiled quietly.

“For example, eight decades ago, the people in Forest's Edge suffered greatly from poverty. They didn’t have proper weapons and didn’t know the habits of kiba. They were prohibited from foraging the forest for food— Many either died from fighting the kiba or hunger. That’s what I learned from Jiba Wu.”

“...Yes.”

“Even so, the people in the past still lived in Forest's Edge proudly, and learned the skills and knowledge of hunting kiba. They sold the kiba’s tusks and horns to buy steel, pots, food, and cloth, successfully building the lives we have now. The Wu clan and Lutim house are wealthier, and are purchasing other types of ingredients and accessories for the women on top of daily necessities. Grandma Jiba and the others knew how tough the past was, and are satisfied with their current life. As long as people like that exist— a wealthy life won’t make us depraved.”

“Yes.”

That’s all I could muster.

After hearing Kaslan Lutim’s words, my feelings became clearer.

Ai Fa listened to our conversation quietly. What were her thoughts about this?

“...I want to make an assumption...”

Kaslan Lutim continued speaking seriously.

“Asuta, If your work in the Post Station Town is successful, and the kiba meat is sold for copper plates— As only the kins of the Wu clan has learned bloodletting from you, we will be the only ones who can peddle meat.”

“That’s right.”

“If the Wu clan’s wealth increases with time and surpasses the Tsun clan in the future, wouldn’t the people think that hunting kiba is the right path to a prosperous future?”

I was shocked.

Kaslan Lutim smiled.

“I don’t know what Kamyua Yost is thinking. Going by what you said, he is planning to weaken the Tsun clan’s power. And so I wondered what I would think if I were in his shoes— and so, I tried thinking what kind of impact the selling of kiba meat will have on the Tsun clan. But in order to arrive at the conclusion I stated earlier, he needs to know that [Only the Wu clan and their kins have learned bloodletting].”

That man probably knew that already.

Compared to Kamyua Yost’s schemes, Kaslan Lutim’s conclusion surprised me more.

“Kaslan Lutim. You... You are incredible. I can’t think that far ahead.”

“I’m not that good. My only strong points are thinking and hunting kiba.”

Kaslan Lutim stared at me with his honest eyes.

“However, I have not seen Kamyua Yost in person before. I can’t trust someone I have never met. But I trust you, Asuta and Ai Fa... What are your thoughts about this?”

Ai Fa answered his query.

There was a strong light in her blue eyes as she looked at Kaslan Lutim’s earnest face.

“Kaslan Lutim, I can’t talk about such lofty aspirations like you. No matter what

happens in the future, I don't think the Tsun clan can regain their guts as a denizen of Forest's Edge."

"Yes."

"However— If Asuta and my decision can benefit life in Forest's Edge a little... I will feel pride in that."

"...I see."

Kaslan Lutim smiled gently.

He turned towards me.

"I concur with what Ai Fa said. But we don't understand Kamyua Yost enough, and can't agree to his proposal so easily. We need to check for any traps in his suggestion."

"That's true, you are right."

Kaslan Lutim nodded firmly.

"Ai Fa, Asuta, when you find the right path and need any help, don't hesitate to visit again if you need the aid of house Lutim. You might not be kins of house Lutim, but you are good friends that are trustworthy. House Lutim will always welcome you."

"Yes, Thank you. I'm very grateful."

I reached out my right hand unconsciously, then pulled it back quickly.

"Sorry. In my country, shaking hands is a sign of friendship. I don't think there is such a custom in Forest's Edge."

"I just need to shake hands?"

Kaslan Lutim tilted his head quizzically, then extended his right hand.

I gripped the hunter's big strong hand with all my might.

He grasped my hand with equal strength.

“Asuta, your capability might far exceed my imagination. I hope you can be a medicine for Forest's Edge.”

After Kaslan Lutim said his piece, we left the Lutim house.

Part 2

After leaving house Lutim, we headed straight for the Post Station Town.

We wanted to end this preposterous issue as soon as possible, so we decided to visit Kamyua Yost during our trip to buy a pot.

Ai Fa placed a necklace worth 20 kiba into a bag usually used for vegetables, and hung it under her underarm.

After Kaslan Lutim told us the shortest route from house Lutim to the Post Station Town, we passionately— actually, we weren't that hot blooded— walked towards the Post Station Town.

"...The more I think about it, the more ludicrous this proposal seems."

I said to Ai Fa on the way there.

"It is surprising that down to earth Forest Edge denizens like you and Kaslan Lutim actually agreed to this. However, everyone wishes for the denizens of Forest's Edge to live a more prosperous life after all."

"That's only natural. I experienced the pains of such poverty too."

Ai Fa looked away, and muttered:

"I told you before, right? When my father Gill couldn't do his work as a hunter due to a leg injury, the Fa house almost got wiped out. The Fa house didn't have any kins. If my shoddy trap didn't capture a young kiba— at that time, we would have starved to death."

"Oh right... You did mention that."

"When the entire family was forced to the brink, I understood how terrible my father felt. I don't think anyone should undergo such pain."

"...Hmm."

“This idea might be coming from a citizen of Rock City, but, as long as we earn the money by our own means, even Donda Wu who hates Rock City won’t be able to complain about this. This is a match between Forest’s Edge and Rock City.”

Ai Fa finally glanced my way.

Her voice was heavy, but her eyes were clear..

“...As long as you are by my side, we will have the upper hand in this fight.”

“What, I won’t give you anything even if you flatter me you know?”

I felt so proud that my heart was almost bursting. In order to hide how I felt, I intentionally showed a cheerful face.

“But we need to investigate Kamyua Yost first. If that uncle has any schemes, things will be bad. We need to ask about opening a stall in the Post Station Town, and try our best to probe what his true intentions are.”

“...You are right.”

Ai Fa’s expression became serious and she turned to the front.

Letting the people in the city understand the value of kiba meat is a ludicrous fight.

But since Ai Fa and Kaslan Lutim found great meaning in it— I was willing to fight this uphill battle.

First, we need to face the man of dubious origins again— Kamyua Yost.

The first step of this battle was to determine if this man will be a medicine to Forest's Edge or a poison.



And so, we went to the Post Station Town once again.

The sun had already gone past the peak, compared to our last visit, we arrived later, and there were more people in town.

Before us was a 10 m wide stone street, with tall buildings erected on both sides of it. All sorts of people in various attire were walking around. The huge Totos Moa were pulling wagons. The crowded streets were hot, noisy and full of heat from the people.

The crowded Post Station Town made me dizzy. I turned to Ai Fa as I walked in the crowd.

“Let’s settle the troublesome matter first. Besides, I don’t want to visit the inn with an iron pot.”

Where was that 《Kimyusu’s Tail Inn》 Kamyua Yost was lodging?

On a closer look, almost all the buildings here had gigantic signboards, with curvy hieroglyphs drawn on them.

I asked Ai Fa what the signs said, and she answered: “How would I know.”

I could only ask a pedestrian.

And so— We started observing the people in the city once again.

The pedestrians were roughly divided into four skin colours, yellowish brown, ivory, black and white. Yellowish brown and ivory were about equal in number. Blacks and whites were relatively fewer.

Most of the people who were looking at Ai Fa with suspicious eyes had yellowish brown skin.

Those with ivory skin had similar reactions.

In comparison, the whites and blacks didn’t show any fear or disdain in their eyes— However, their attitude wasn’t friendly. Some didn’t care about us at all, while others stared at Ai Fa curiously.

I thought it would be more appropriate to talk to someone that looked similar to me, so I decided to talk to a ivory skinned youth.

“Excuse me, do you know about an inn called 《Kimyusu’s Tail Inn》 ?”

The youth had short brown hair. He stopped in surprise, and alternated his gaze between Ai Fa and me suspiciously.

His face— showed no signs of fear.

Or any obvious hint of disdain.

He seemed troubled and confused.

“..... 《Kimyusu’s Tail Inn》 is that building with red roof tiles.”

“I see, thank you.”

The youth quickly turned and left.

I have nothing to do with the denizens of Forest's Edge! He seemed to be doing his best to express this fact.

That was a natural reaction, so I scratched my head.

“Alright, let’s go.”

Most buildings here were built from wood, and at first glance, the bare wooden planks could be clearly seen. But there were also many walls and roofs that were painted either red or green.

Were they decorations or some form of preservatives? Maybe both? I couldn’t tell.

No matter what, we have arrived at our first destination.

This large building had two floors like the other houses. I saw a cursive drawing on the sign board, a part of it resembled the feathers of a bird..

When I tasted a meat bun in the Post Station Town last time, Kamyua Yost said that was a kimyusu meat bun. The meat inside the bun tasted as bland as chicken fillet, so that was probably the name of a type of bird.

“.....Ai Fa, are you alright?”

“What’s the matter?”

“Nothing, just that this is probably the first time you entered a building inside the Post Station Town.”

Ai Fa shrugged silently.

Her gestures were implying: “There isn’t any place more dangerous than the forest, is it?”

However, I think the real threat to hunters weren’t the horns of the kiba but the blades wielded by humans. But if we were to leave now, there wouldn’t be any progress.

The door to the inn had metal hinges instead of a sliding door. As there wasn’t any handles on the door, I placed my hands on the double door and pushed it open gently.

“Welcome...”

The other party’s voice stiffened midway.

A middle aged man sat behind a waist high counter and looked at us in surprise.

He was a slightly plump man with yellowish brown skin.

I couldn’t tell his stature since he was seated behind the counter, but he didn’t seem to be too tall.

He had a cylindrical shaped hat on his head, wore grey clothes and a grey apron. I often saw such a style of clothing on the streets.

“...Here for a meal?”

You ain’t here for lodgings, right? The store owner’s large eyes seemed to be intimidating us.

The contempt in his eyes exceeded his fear.

“No, we are here to visit Kamyua Yost who should be lodging here.”

“Kamyua?”

The middle aged man opened his eyes wide in surprise again, with still a hint of caution on his face.

He then muttered: “That madman...” and turned his neck to gaze the inside of the inn.

“Kamyua! You have guests! Can I let them in!?”

There was a restaurant inside the inn.

It was afternoon, meal time had already passed and the crowd in the restaurant was sparse. There were three long wooden tables and chairs inside. The atmosphere here wasn’t bad, and reminded me of the cabins in ski resorts.

However— the men seated inside had a dangerous air around them.

They had different hair and skin colour, but all were burly built with sinister faces. Three out of the five had leather chest armour and steel gauntlets. They had weapons like blades, axes and maces on their waist— and they were drunk.

If they could earn a livelihood, I wouldn’t mind them drinking in the afternoon. However, I found their gazes to be unpleasant when they turned their faces our way.

Curious gazes.

Looks of contempt.

Suspicious stares.

And— lustful leerings.

They didn’t fear Ai Fa.

Some of them acted as if they were looking at something filthy, others showed a malicious smile like Doddo Tsun.

The atmosphere was terrible.

“Hey, Kamyua, are you there? Are you asleep!?”

The middle aged man yelled again.

“Yes!”

At this moment, a cute voice rang out.

A boy with light brown hair ran out from the depths of the restaurant.

The boy was about ten years old and had a pair of brown eyes filled with intelligence.

“Are you Ai Fa and Asuta from house Fa? Welcome! I’m Kamyua Yost’s disciple Leito. This way please.”

Disciple?

In what sense?

The boy’s light brown hair was rather long, and his face was gentle.

He wore a sleeveless shirt and long pants, with a small pouch and knife on his waist, and leather boots on his feet. His dressing was tidy and looked kind and docile, if I was his family, I would definitely tell him not to get involved with that suspicious looking uncle.

But I was a guest and not his family, so I could only follow the boy’s lead and meet with Kamyua Yost.

“Hey, since you are in my restaurant, you have to place an order.”

The middle aged man called out to us.

“Oh, that’s right. What would you like to have?”

The boy turned towards us.

“Hmm? It’s my first time in a place like this, I’m not too sure—”

I whispered to the boy:

“Also, I don’t have any copper plates right now.”

“I see, I got it.”

The boy smiled gently and turned towards the owner.

“I want to order two zozo tea. Please add it to our tab. We will be sitting at the usual place.”

“Alright.”

The middle aged man waved his right hand.

As I looked at the stairs leading to the second floor, the boy, me and Ai Fa entered the inn in that order.



The eyes of the men drinking alcohol followed us.

Fortunately, they didn't taunt us when we passed by their table.

At the end of the passage, I saw an entrance without any door. After passing it, I saw a room which was about the size of the restaurant. The tables were smaller, but much more numerous than the other room. The other furnishing was about the same.

I saw the familiar golden locks in the furthest seat.

That was Kamyua Yost.

He was sleeping soundly.

He leaned against the wall behind him while seated in his wooden chair, with his long legs resting on the table rudely. He breathed steadily during his slumber.

There weren't any other guests in the room.

"Kamyua, your guests are here! The guests from Forest's Edge you have been waiting so eagerly for. Get up!"

The boy sat beside Kamyua Yost and clapped loudly before his nose.

"Nyaa."

Kamyua Yost made an unhappy grunt.

I'm sorry, but that wasn't cute at all.

"Ughh, what is it? I still want to sleep more... Hmm? Ai Fa? Asuta? You are here so soon!"

He opened his slightly drooping eyes, and a gleeful smile appeared on his long face.

"That was unsightly of me. Please have a seat! Leito, get them some tea."

"I already asked the inn owner to send some over. You can put your legs down now."

"Ah, sorry sorry."

The feet in leather boots disappeared from the table, and the boy wiped the table nimbly with a rag.

“Please have a seat.”

“Thank you.”

After sitting down, I realized that Ai Fa was a little hesitant.

Speaking of which, I had never seen a chair in Forest's Edge.

Even so, Ai Fa still sat down coldly with her cape flowing behind her.

“Oh, I never imagined that you would visit just one day later. Ai Fa, Asuta, I’m really happy.”

Kamyua Yost gave a big yawn after saying that.

“Sorry sorry, I was working the entire night and lack sleep.”

“I see. What work did you do after that?”

“Hmm? I was scouting out Forest's Edge the whole night.”

“...Aren’t you afraid of the Gizu biting your legs?”

“Compared to kiba and hunters, those Gizu are nothing.”

By the way, the Gizu they mentioned were about the size of weasels. They were nocturnal and had a likeable appearance, but ate rotten meat like munto. It was said that wounds from their bite would rot.

“Since you made the trip to visit, have you seriously considered my proposal?”

“We hope you can provide us with some information to help us make our decision. However, the main reason we are here in the Post Station Town is for shopping, and this is along the way.”

An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, since he was taking things so lightly, I responded with the same attitude.

We couldn't let him lead us by the nose.

"Here, the zozo tea you ordered."

The previous middle-aged man came over.

He placed porcelain cups before Ai Fa and me.

The grey round cups had handles with wavy patterns carved on it. It looked like a beer mug.

"Oh, the owner is serving us personally, thank you for your hard work."

"What choice do I have, my daughter is too scared to come here."

That man glared at Ai Fa and me.

He wasn't tall, but he was stout and burly, and should be quite strong.

"Kamyua, anyone who places an order is a customer in my shop. But in case of any disturbance, I will have to ask you to leave."

"Have I ever caused any trouble before? You worry too much."

"...Whatever. But this is still a restaurant, go back to your room if you want to sleep. You have to order something if you want to sit here."

"Ah, you have a point. Leito and I will each have a zozo tea— and also give me one person's portion of Kimyusu salted meat."

"There's four of you, but you are only ordering one portion."

The man turned and left after saying that.

Even though he was in the service industry, the middle-aged man was very rude. Was it because he dislike the denizens of Forest's Edge? Or was he always so brusque

towards Kamyua Yost...? Probably both.

When I fell into deep thoughts, Ai Fa scrawled her nose as she sniffed the tea. Just like an animal.

“...What is this?”

“Since it’s called zozo tea, it’s probably tea made from that shriveled snake-like vegetable.”

I remembered this herbal fragrance. Maybe zozo wasn’t an ingredient meant for cooking.

“Should your reaction mean that Forest's Edge doesn’t have the practice of drinking tea? Please have a try, just think of it as experiencing a different culture.”

“...Kamyua Yost, I have no reason to accept your offerings.”

“Didn’t you treat me to a meal yesterday? This is just me returning the favor.”

“That was in exchange for the fruit wine you brought. We have no debts between us now.”

“...Asuta, what should we do?”

Kamyua Yost looked my way.

I fell into deep thought.

“In that case, Ai Fa, let’s give him something in return? Since we didn’t bring any copper plates with us, we can barter with him by offering something of similar value.”

After tilting her head slightly, Ai Fa took out a palm-sized package wrapped in fake rubber leaves.

“This is kiba jerky, are you willing to accept this in exchange?”

“Kiba jerky! I’m intrigued! Leito, this is kiba jerky!”

“Uwah, let me try some later.”

Ai Fa looked at the two of them as they conversed.

She met two citizens of Rock City that didn't shun kiba meat. As Leito was a disciple of Kamyua Yost, his reaction wasn't a good reference, but we still made a mental note about this.

By the way, after I took a sip of zozo tea, I found the strong fragrance of the tea very palatable, I didn't mind its taste.

Sitting in a chair and sipping tea made me a little nostalgic of home.

“Well then... it's about time to go into the main topic.”

Resting his elbow on the table, a smile appeared on Kamyua Yost's thin face.

Part 3

“It’s easy to open a stall in the Post Station Town. Erecting a new shop is tedious, but everyone can peddle their merchandize in the market after paying a cheap venue fee.”

“Cheap venue fee?”

“Yes. Just one white copper plate for ten days, a great bargain, right...? That’s about one kiba worth of tusks and horns.”

“One kiba can be exchanged for one white copper plate... Wait, how many red copper plates are in one white copper plate?”

When he heard my question, Leito who was seated beside Kamyua Yost opened his eyes wide.

That was only natural. My question was like asking how many ten yen coins a hundred yen coin could be exchanged for.

“Ten red copper plates are equivalent to one white copper plate. You remember the kimyusu meat bun Tara ate? You can make the money back by selling ten of them. Increasing the number of stalls in the market will also improve the prosperity of the Post Station Town. The venue fee is just a small token.”

“Please wait, let me think... One kiba can be exchanged for ten meals of aria and poitan... Hmm? I see, a serving of our meal costs about one red copper plate.”

“Dinner last night was too sumptuous, if you want to operate a food stall, the portion needs to be half of dinner. Or even less. It will be best to set the price at two red copper plates. If it is too cheap, it will earn the ire of other stall owners.”

“And so, assuming the ingredient cost is also half of dinner last night, that will be half of a red copper plate. Calculating simply, selling one portion will yield one and a half red copper plates as profit— We just need to sell seven of them in ten days to offsets the fees.”

“Yes. But if you need to rent a stall, you will need to pay another white copper plate as rental.”

Even with the stall rental, we just need to sell 14 portions to break even. What an easy business.

...Assuming that the pedestrians were willing to eat kiba.

“Meat is usually more expensive than vegetables. Everyone uses higher quality vegetables than aria or poitan. Assuming the owner of that meat bun stall wants to make a profit, she needs to sell ten to twenty meat buns daily. But with the traffic in Post Station Town, this is not difficult.”

Kamyua Yost smiled gleefully.

“How about it Asuta, do you understand why I proposed for the two of you to open a stall? With your culinary skill and the power of the kiba meat, I don’t think you will fail.”

“If our business flourishes, the citizens of Post Station Town will acknowledge the value of kiba meat and their discrimination towards Forest’s Edge will gradually fade. I see, there are plenty of benefits in running this business.”

I imitated Kamyua Yost and propped my elbows onto the table and leaned forward.

“Well then— Kamyua Yost, what do you stand to gain?”

“Hmm, do you think I want to earn some profit? Let me think— How about giving me a tenth of the pure profits, excluding the ingredient and venue fees to me as thanks.”

“This has nothing to do with money. We just want to know your objective.”

“I already said that I just want to satisfy my own sense of camaraderie! As long as the denizens of Forest’s Edge are no longer seen as avatars of horror and the hunters gain more profit, I will be satisfied.”

His uniquely colored eyes looked Ai Fa’s way.

“Ai Fa, did you think my actions last night were out of pity for the denizens of Forest’s Edge? I didn’t mean that. I just really like the denizens of Forest’s Edge. I can’t be a part of your tribe, so I can only share my ideas with you. Can you understand my feelings?”

“...I don’t think you are pitying us. I believe you are having fun at our expense.”

“That’s great!—Hmm? Is that a good thing?”

“Don’t mind it, Kamyua. You are always distrusted by others.”

The boy said something mean with a smile.

After hearing that, the subject himself said with a smile “That’s true.” Since he already admitted it, we two as bystanders couldn’t add anything.

“Hmm... I see...”

“What are you so troubled about? I already told you plenty of times, only the locals in Genos would be afraid of the denizens of Forest's Edge and kiba for no reason. Besides, the threat posed by the kiba isn’t causing any major catastrophe, and the denizens of Forest's Edge just treat them as harmful pests. The people of Genos already lost their fear of kiba. Instead of the kiba, they are afraid of the people of Forest’s Edge.”

Kamyua Yost pulled his gaze away from Ai Fa and looked my way again.

“It might sound strange, but if the denizens of Forest's Edge would set up a stall in the Post Station Town, no one will dare to visit. But you look similar to the people in the Post Station Town. When they see you selling kiba cookings, they will be confused and curious about you. The southerners and westerners will not hesitate to try your kiba dish. As your cooking is perfect, you will definitely draw in the people in Genos by word of mouth.”

“I see...”

“To be honest, I don’t think such a trivial matter will wipe away their discrimination against the denizens of Forest's Edge.”

Kamyua Yost narrowed his eyes in a smile.

When he smiles like this, his expression becomes similar to grandma Jiba, as if he could see the way the world works.

“The denizens of Forest's Edge have beast-like eyes, extraordinary strength and keep to themselves, that's why they are feared and respected. This has accumulated over 80 years. Actually, their nature doesn't fit the impression which the citizens have of them. I don't mind the people in the city fearing the denizens of Forest's Edge. After all, I have no expectations of the people in the city working happily with the denizens of Forest's Edge.”

“What— do you mean by that?”

“The hunters from Forest's Edge can continue to be aloof. Hunters are not suited for a peaceful town... I don't want to see depraved hunters... However, I will be angry if anyone looks down on hunters and think of them as a lowly existence. The citizens can fear and respect hunters, but they should think of them as a sacred existence, not as evil monsters.”

“.....”

“We need to wipe away the wrong misconception the citizens of Genos have and stop them from seeing the denizens of Forest's Edge as 《lowly kiba eater》. Who exactly are the ones protecting the fields of Genos, stopping the harassment of the kiba and contributing to the prosperity of Genos? I hope they can figure that out.”

“...I wish you were always showing such a face when talking to us. It would make me believe every word you say without any doubts.”

I remained cautious in my words.

“To be honest, I don't think you are lying. But I still don't understand why you are still so persistent with regards to the denizens of Forest's Edge... May I ask, is changing one's faith a huge matter in this continent?”

The boy Leito was surprised again.

Kamyua Yost's eyes remained clear.

“It's very big. Only those who had experienced it will understand how it feels.”

“I see... Eight decades ago, the denizens of Forest's Edge abandoned the southern jungles and moved to Morga Forest. It has been a long time since then, are the denizens

in Forest's Edge able to understand how you feel?”

“Of course. That’s why my sense of camaraderie will always be one-sided... It has been eighty years after all. There isn’t anyone older than eighty in Forest's Edge, right?”

Grandma Jiba is probably the only one who was that old.

I still didn’t trust this man enough to bring up Grandma Jiba.

I answered with a vaguely:

“Who knows?”

“...Asuta, since you insist that you are not someone from this continent, you don’t worship the four gods either, right?”

“You are correct. But I’m a denizen of Forest's Edge, so my faith lies with the western god, even if only in name.”

“Hmm, from this perspective, you fit really well in Forest's Edge. The denizens of Forest's Edge used to worship the god of the south Jaguar but switched to the western god Selva. However, their faith lies elsewhere right from the beginning— What they worship is the forest, not the gods. They see the forest as an irreplaceable existence. Perhaps, it is their simple and selfless lifestyle that draws them to me.”

Kamyua Yost closed his eyes, hiding his incredible light under his eyelids.

A difficult to describe calm filled the entire room— At this moment, a third party broke the silence.

“Here’s the zozo tea and the kimyusu salted meat you ordered.”

With a thud, the third party placed a giant plate on the table.

The middle-aged man had served our orders.

Kamyua Yost watched the man as he turned and left quickly, and an elusive smile appeared on his face again.

“Asuta, try this. This is a dish sold in the Post Station Town. You worked as a chef

before, so this will pique your interest, right?”

“...I already tried a Kimyusu meat bun at a street stall.”

“I see. But this dish tastes different from that meat bun.”

I shifted my gaze on to the dining table.

There was a large plate filled with stewed meat and vegetables.

The vegetables were completely dried up, and a translucent, gooey sauce covered the white meat and several types of vegetables.

On closer inspection, I found diced aria and pula in there, as well as mashed chachi.

This dish had the refreshing fragrance of herbs similar to lilo.

Several pieces of white wraps, which looked like the wraps used in dumplings. This was probably used to wrap the dish before eating it.

The presentation and the aroma of the food weren't bad.

“Please try some. If you don't have any appetite, just a bite will do. Please do have some, since the zozo tea alone can't compare to your delicious jerky.”

I wanted to try it out of pure curiosity.

I glanced at Ai Fa to confirm with her, then picked up the spoon and the small wrap. Making a rough estimate of the number of wraps and the number of vegetables, I scooped two spoons of it onto the wrap.

After rolling it up into a small crepe, I took a bite—

It was very salty.

The flavoring relied completely on the herbs and their fragrance.

The aria was overcooked, the chachi wasn't cooked enough, and the pula had a hint of bitterness— with a side of kimyusu meat that was as tasteless as chicken breast.

On a whole, it wasn't too bad.

A simple taste.

The meat had been pickled to extend its shelf life. The chef then cooked it together with the vegetables. The chachi will taste better if it was cooked a little longer. Aside from that, this dish didn't have any flaws worth mentioning.

However— If you asked me if I was willing to pay money for this, I would be hesitant.

“kimyusu salted meat is the most popular dish in this inn. It has a strong taste and is well suited to be a snack with beer. I think it costs three red copper plates. The people here will eat something light in the day, and when night falls, this inn will be filled with patrons. Everyone will show a satisfied expression when they eat this dish.”

Kamyua Yost smiled like a Cheshire cat.

“The dishes in the Post Station Town are mainly extensions of a home-cooked meal. They are made by the wives and daughters of the inn owners. In Genos, chefs can only be found inside the castle walls.”

“...I see.”

“Asuta, can you rival this salted meat dish and kimyusu bun with your cooking?”

“Are you taunting me? I'm not that retarded, and will not act rashly.”

It was about time to leave. After finishing that piece of kimyusu salted meat, I drank the rest of my zozo tea.

I then whispered to Ai Fa: “Do you want to ask any questions?”. She just shook her head quietly.

“I will discuss with my house head again, and with our friends in Forest's Edge. If there aren't any problems— I will then take you up on your suggestion.”

“Asuta, you are really careful! That is a good point about you.”

It's your fault that I'm so cautious. I shrugged.

“Kamyua, if we make up our mind to open a stall in the Post Station Town, can we discuss this with you again?”

“Yes. You can also speak to the relevant person directly. One of the managers for the marketplace is the boss of this inn, Milano Mast. Anyway, you will be fine if you come over to the 《Kimyusu’s Tail Inn》.”

“Thank you. We have not made our decision yet, but your suggestion made me think about many things. Even if we don’t open a stall, in the end, I’m still glad to have spoken with you.”

“I’m happy to hear that... Are you going already? Leito, I leave the rest to you. After finishing this salted meat, I will take a little nap.”

“Alright. Asuta, Ai Fa, let’s go.”

I looked a little confused at the boy who was all smiles.

“Go? Where? We are going back to Forest's Edge after buying our things.”

“It won’t take too much of your time. Tara’s father wishes to thank you. He runs a stall in the marketplace, I will bring you there.”

During my first visit to the Post Station Town, I met a girl called Tara.

Back then, Doddo Tsun was drunk and stirring up trouble in the Post Station Town, and Tara was almost dragged into it. Ai Fa and I intervened and saved her.

That was already ten days ago. I felt a little embarrassed that her father wanted to thank me.

“Why don’t you go and meet him? Tara is a good kid, she will be a beauty in a few years. Now is a good time to befriend her.”

The one who made such a retarded speech was not the boy of course, but his mentor.

I wasn’t Hikaru Genji, so I smiled wryly and stole a peek at Ai Fa... And for some unknown reason, she was staring at me coldly.

Just what kind of person did she think I was?

“Alright then, I will take my leave.”

“Yes, I look forward to meeting the two of you again.”

In the end, no other customers came into the room aside from us, and we headed to the entrance.

The group of men we saw earlier were still drinking in the inn.

One of the men looked our way, his gaze looked drunker than earlier.

“Hey, black-haired kid! How did you make a 《Kiba Eater》 woman your thing? Can you tell us how you managed to do that?”

Hmm, they probably wouldn’t let us go so easily.

I had one rather bad habit. I wouldn’t mind others insulting me, but if they were to make fun of Ai Fa— I would lose my cool.

“Instead of hunting kiba, she realized hunting men is an easier way to bring in money! Hey 《Kiba Eater》, can I buy a night with you with two copper plates?”

I turned towards the men.

Two things happened at this moment which held my roar in my throat.

Ai Fa who was walking behind me grabbed my arm, and the boy Leito walking in front of me said quietly:

“Please stop. They are my mentor’s guest. A slight towards them means a slight towards my mentor, understand?”

The voice of the boy had yet to break, and his high pitched words didn’t bore a shred of emotion.

He looked at the men. I couldn’t see his expression, but I did notice the changes in the appearances of the men.

The two men who were making the crude remarks stood stiffly with their bottles in their hands.

Their faces— looked as if they saw a ferocious beast in the jungle, their eyes wide and face stiff.

“What’s wrong with you guys?”

The other men shook their companion’s shoulders.

Leito glanced at them sideways, then smiled at me.

“Sorry about that. Let’s go.”

As expected from a disciple of that man.

After I started walking with a sigh, Ai Fa poked my back.

“Hey, I already told you not to get agitated since you can’t protect yourself. You are too reckless sometimes.”

“...Ai Fa, you become reckless as well when hamburg steak is mentioned.”

“That has nothing to do with what I’m talking about right now.”

She then poked me a few more times as we left the 《Kimyusu’s Tail Inn》 .

Part 4

After exiting the building, the sun was still high in the sky and the streets crowded.

“What are you planning to buy?”

“Hmm, I want an iron pot. It’s sold in the marketplace.”

“Iron pot, huh. How big?”

“It’s quite large, about this size.”

The diameter was about 60 cm, and about 30 cm deep. I used my arms to make a half circle.

“The iron pot is heavy. Can I bring you to Tara’s stall? It’s located at the edge of the marketplace.”

“Erm, well, Ai Fa, is it fine?”

“Whatever.”

I couldn’t see any change in emotion on Ai Fa’s face.

But she looked a little tired.

That worried me a little, and I asked her softly: “What are you thinking about?”

“After listening to what he had to say, my impression of him remains unchanged. I don’t think he intends to deceive us, but— in my heart, he is still a suspicious character.”

“I see.”

I could understand how she felt.

I didn’t think Kamyua Yost was lying.

That man harbored deep feelings towards the denizens of Forest's Edge.

But his passion was too intense, which felt out of place to me.

Besides, there are other issues aside from that guy.

Leito led us along the stone paved path as I thought:

If I open a kiba snack stall in this city, will there really be business?

We just stepped outside when the gazes from the passersby fell on Ai Fa. Not all of them are negative, but the denizens of Forest's Edge would always be out of place in the city.

Even though Kamyua Yost said carefreely that "Just target the travelers in the beginning", would it be that simple?

If the business were to fail, we would only lose our copper plates. But acting rashly might deepen the animosity between Forest's Edge and the Post Station Town, which would be terrible.

Even if Kamyua Yost had no intention of tricking us, he might still have misjudged the situation. We needed to investigate further.

I wondered if there is anyone who is neutral in the Post Station Town. I wanted to learn their opinion.

While I was still feeling troubled by it, we reached the marketplace.

A familiar woman was inside the stall, making meat buns for the kids.

It had just passed noon, the time when people start to eat a light lunch. On a closer look, I realized that the food stalls around the area were all crowded.

A youth was eating as he walked, having a white wrap in his hand that held brown meat and green vegetables.

A group of men was drinking along the side of the road and snacking on food that looked like bird claws.

I heard a rowdy chatter and looked that way. What I saw was similar to an outdoor restaurant, with a wide roof over it. People sat on chairs and chatted as they sipped on stew in wooden bowls.

“...Why are you looking all over the place?”

“Well~ I’m doing market research.”

I didn’t know how things would turn out.

If I want the development to be to our advantage, I needed to gather more info.

Besides— I was the only one in Forest's Edge who could do that.

If someone like me didn’t appear in Forest's Edge, Kamyua Yost would never have thought up such a crazy plan.

With some practice, the women of the Wu clan would be able to cook a dish on the level of that salted meat.

However, I don’t think the denizens of Forest's Edge would be capable of “running a business”. They bartered kiba tusks and horns for copper plates, then used the plates to exchange for food. On the surface, this was definitely a form of commercial trading, but the denizens of Forest's Edge didn’t think of it as such.

In the first place, selling wild games they hunted to traders was different from doing business with an undetermined number of customers.

If I could be of use in such a way, I will do everything within my power.

Since Ai Fa and Kaslan Lutim thought this was the right path, I won’t hesitate in walking down it.

To stop them from making the wrong choices, I had to look carefully at the places they couldn’t see, listen to the sounds they couldn’t hear and convey these to them accurately.

“Oh, that’s the stall. Tara is there too.”

When I heard Leito saying that, I raised my head and found myself at the end of the marketplace.

Before us was a road flanked by trees, and the stone walls surrounding the castle town could be seen far off to the left.

We passed by this place the last time too. As I thought about that— a surprised voice from a girl came from the left.

“Asuta onii-chan! Leito, you really brought him here!”

Tara appeared before us.

She was wearing an orange one-piece dress today too as she stood under the roof of a certain stall and waved at us.

That stall— only had a flimsy roof, with a large piece of cloth laid out on the ground and vegetables arranged on it, a simple vegetable stall— Ai Fa and I bought aria and poitan here before.

A burly man stood beside the girl as he waited for us with a stiff smile.

After Ai Fa and I looked at each other, we walked towards them behind Leito.

“Asuta onii-chan, long time no see! Thank you for saving me the previous time!”

“It’s nothing, no need to thank me. You helped me a lot after that too.”

“I can’t do that! If not for onii-chan, Tara would have been squashed like that bun! Thank you!”

Tara had shoulder length dark brown hair, and her dark brown eyes were lively. An energetic eight-year-old girl.

The middle-aged man stood beside Tara, his hair and beard were similar in color to her, and both of them had yellowish brown skin.

This color combination could be commonly seen in the Post Station Town, so I didn’t notice the resemblance between them earlier.

The hair and eye colors of the Wu clan vary widely, so I thought the people of this world wouldn't be affected by genetics in such a way and overlooked this detail.

No matter what, this was the second time I have met them.

The middle-aged man stood up straight and took off the white cloth wrapped around his head. He lowered his head, covered in unkempt hair and streaks of white, towards Ai Fa and me in a bow.

"E-Excuse me, you saved my daughter Tara a few days ago... I-I'm very grateful. I wanted to t-thank you in person, so I troubled you to make a trip here..."

Cold sweat rolled down his rounded face.

Even though the denizens of Forest's Edge terrified him— he still wanted to thank us.

"You are welcome. Tara has also been a great help. When we were almost taken away by the guards, we managed to avoid being interrogated because Tara testified for us."

"D-Don't mention it, it was nothing..."

He was burlier than the inn owner we met earlier. He mentioned before that he grew his aria himself, which meant his work straddled both agriculture and peddling.

People born and bred in Genos would probably fear the denizens of Forest's Edge— I felt bad about him showing such a face in front of his daughter.

Tara also had a blank expression, as if she felt lost.

"...Your daughter only met with danger..."

Ai Fa said suddenly.

"Eek!"

The middle-aged man grabbed Tara's shoulder and backed away.

Tara also looked at Ai Fa with an uneasy gaze.

“...because I hit that drunkard without any forethought. I knew she was right beside them, but I still acted first to suppress the scum as soon as possible. If Asuta didn’t rush to her aid, that man’s big body would have fallen on her and injured her.”

Ai Fa bowed quietly.

“That was careless of me. I should apologize to you for that.”

“I-It’s fine, well...”

“Uncle, you don’t need to be wary, they aren’t reckless people. When some drunkards insulted them earlier, I was the one who got enraged instead.”

The boy quickly eased the mood with a smile.

Enraged— I couldn’t tell that he was angered just now.

“Mr. Asuta might be setting up a stall around here in the near future. You will be neighbors then, so now will be a good time to clear up any misunderstandings.”

“Eh? Asuta onii-chan, are you going to open a stall!?”

Tara’s reaction was more intense than the middle-aged man.

“It has not been decided yet... If I do set up a stall, will it be located around here?”

“Yes, there isn’t any more space down the other road. Since you will also be a new stall tenant, your stall will be located in the northern zone.”

“Uncle, are you a new stall owner too?”

“Huh? No, I have been here for twenty years. I will need to bribe the ones in charge to get a spot in the crowded central zone, so I chose to stay here instead.”

Even though he was panicking, the uncle still mustered his courage and answered.

As expected, he was good-natured.

“I still haven’t made my decision. If I really set up a stall here, I will be in your care. I will be buying the food ingredients from you then.”

“W-What will you be peddling?”

Oh right, he was a Genos local, not related to Kamyua Yost. I could use this valuable chance to ask for his opinion.

This might be a chance Kamyua Yost arranged for us— would it be too nefarious for me to think of it this way?

Let’s do some market research.

“I will be frank, I’m planning to sell food made from kiba meat... Do you have any opinions about this?”

He opened his eyes wide in surprise.

“T-That kind of thing... won’t sell, right?”

I see.

He was shocked, no, he was stunned, but he didn’t seem to be disgusted.

It appeared that peddling kiba food in the Post Station Town wasn’t on the level of announcing that “I want to open a shop to sell food made from spiders”.

“Will it make the neighboring stalls unhappy? Will anyone become furious and demand me to not sell kiba food near his stall?”

“I-It’s not for us to decide... but...”

“But?”

“I-If the kiba food were to give off a terrible stench, it would be troubling for us.”

“Kiba dishes don’t have a stench. If you try it, you will be able to taste its unique flavor. Kiba meat that has been properly prepared won’t have any foul taste.”

“Kiba are harmful pests that damage the farms, right? Will their meat really taste good?”

Tara seemed intrigued.

Kiba were classified as “harmful pests” from the perspective of farmers, and has nothing to do with the taste of kiba... Tara probably didn’t understand this yet.

“I think they are delicious, but that’s a matter of personal preference. Kiba do have a unique flavor, and some people might find it hard to accept.”

“I see, that’s amazing. Tara wants to try some too.”

“B-Be quiet...”

Midway through his sentence, the uncle’s eyes started wavering again.

“Excuse me for my late introduction. I’m from the Fa house of Forest's Edge, my name is Asuta. This is the head of the Fa house, Ai Fa. Can you tell me your name, please?”

“...I-I’m Dora.”

The girl was Tara, and the father was Dora. Were they easy to remember, or hard to recall? But the name Dora did suit this middle-aged man.

“Uncle Dora, we are still hesitant about opening a stall. We will suffer heavy losses if our product wouldn’t sell. And most importantly, we don’t want to cause any confusion to the people in the Post Station Town. Uncle, can you share what you really think? For example, do you think[opening a kiba food store here will cause trouble for me], or [no one will ever eat that]? I will take your opinions into consideration before proceeding with starting up the stall.”

“I-I wouldn’t mind if you set up a stall. As long as there isn’t any stench... A-Also... it’s bad if there are frequent commotions...”

He started to stutter towards the end.

But he still answered my question clearly.

Uncle Dora was usually a straightforward man, when I told him “the aria is rotten” last time, his heated reaction told me this much.

“Commotions huh. If I open a stall here, will the citizens find trouble with us?”

“No.. No one dares to pick on the denizens of Forest's Edge...”

He stammered once again.

“Who knows? When we were at the inn just now, some men taunted us. I’m worried that people might stir trouble at our stall if we do open for business.”

“I-Is that so? I wouldn’t dare to do that.”

He really thinks of the denizens of Forest's Edge as dangerous beasts.

Those ruffians in the inn only showed contempt.

Even though they were living in the same environment, their emotions towards things were different.

And— Tara said she “wanted to try to eat some kiba”.

She had been stealing glances at Ai Fa, trying to see what kind of person this scary onee-san was.

“So, how do you feel about kiba dishes? Are you against trying them no matter what?”

“I-I won’t spend money to eat kiba meat; I heard kiba meat is tough and they stink. I don’t want to confirm this point.”

“Will you give it a try if it’s free?”

“If there’s no choice, I can try it...”

“Do you think kiba meat is disgusting and dirty?”

“Kiba isn’t like munto or gizu, and won’t eat rotten meat, right? In my mind, kiba is a detestable creature that ravages the farms.”

The uncle made up his mind and looked towards Ai Fa.

“I-I respect the denizens of Forest's Edge for risking their lives to fend off Kiba and am very grateful. However, many of the elderly think... that, that... after eating the meat of the ferocious kiba, you obtained their violence and strength. Also...”

Aside from fear, there was another emotion in the uncle's eyes.

That should be— rage?

“...Also, the denizens of Forest's Edge do act violently.”

Ai Fa looked at the middle-aged man in silence.

The uncle's yellowish face seemed to be drained of blood, and he was trembling.

“Y-Your people rob our farm products, assault travelers and kidnap girls from the city. Not everyone from Forest's Edge is like that, but they do exist. The man you lectured by the roadside that day is one of them, right? If people like him still exist...”

Both sides wouldn't be able to come to an understanding.

He wanted to say more, but held his peace.

Ai Fa shook her head slowly.

“All I can say is... My conscience is clear.”

She didn't refute the other party.

Robbing farm products, attacking travelers and abducting girls from the city— They had actually fallen so low.

I started getting dizzy from the rage I was feeling.

Even among denizens of Forest's Edge, the difference between individuals was as vast as night and day.

Forest's Edge had many denizens that were as kind as Ai Fa and Kaslan Lutim, yet those people— The chief Tsun clan was actually that depraved.

I couldn't understand at all.

“Be it the city or Forest's Edge, there are all sorts of people around.”

I turned my head in surprise when I heard the boy's voice.

Leito was still smiling even at a time like this.

I was reminded once again that this boy was the disciple of Kamyua Yost.

“I need to go back to Kamyua soon. What about the two of you?”

“Ah, we need to get going. We can't keep intruding on your stall... Thank you, uncle Dora.”

“You are welcome...”

“Asuta, Ai Fa, I'm going off now. I'm looking forward to the kiba dish, good luck!”

In the end— my head was still in a mess.

Part 5

An hour later, we stood before the Lutim house once again.

Ai Fa and I were carrying a super heavy iron pot.

“Ara, it’s Ai Fa and Asuta! What’s the matter? You have a big pot with you! Are you here to cook dinner for us!?”

“Dan Lutim! Are you already back from the forest?”

Less than three hours had passed since noon. The head of the Lutim house had already put away his cape and blades and welcomed us in casual attire.

“There are too many kiba recently. We already got enough tusks and horns for today. A youngster from the branch family suffered some light injury, so we came home early! What will you cook for us today?”

“No, we are here to discuss something with Kaslan Lutim...”

“Oh, is that so.”

The house head's shoulders that were tense with excitement started drooping depressedly.

The head of the Lutim main house Dan Lutim was bald, wore a brown beard and had a beer belly, resembling that of an Arabian genie. He was energetic today too.

“Dan Lutim, since you are home now, can you join our discussion? I have many things I wish to consult with you.”

“I don’t mind joining the talk...”

He pouted like a toddler.

Please don’t infringe the trademark of my house head.

“Asuta, Ai Fa, you are here. How did your talk with Kamyua Yost go?”

Kaslan Lutim appeared from behind Dan Lutim. They were father and son, but I couldn't see any resemblance at all.

I nodded and greeted him in a hurry.

"Sorry for intruding on you again. Hmm? Where's Ema Min Lutim—?"

"In order to master the skills to cook delicious food, she went to the Wu clan with the other women. So I was left behind."

"I see, that's really..."

"Don't mind me, please come in... Will that be alright, house head?"

"Okay..."

He was actually that reluctant.

The head of the Lutim house was regressing towards a child-like state.

And so, Ai Fa and I handed the blades and pot to the Lutim house for safekeeping and visited their place once again.

"— That's the gist of what happened."

There were many things I needed to recount.

"Yes."

Kaslan Lutim nodded with his arms crossed.

"My impression of Kamyua Yost remains unchanged. But I can feel his strong feelings towards Forest's Edge from his words and action— or I should say, obsession. I don't think he plans to deceive you."

"Yes. I still need to observe the situation in the Post Station Town a little longer. There won't be any big issues despite opening a stall in town. We might even make a tidy profit... As for the objective of making them recognize the commercial value of kiba

meat, I will only know the results after opening the stall.”

After bidding farewell to Leito and uncle Dora, we visited quite a number of stalls to conduct our market research.

In the end, based on the information we garnered, a light meal sold in every stall was priced from one to three copper plates, and they could sell between twenty and fifty portions a day. The peak period was around noon.

If that was the case, we could give it a try— That was how I felt.

Kaslan Lutim nodded again.

“Hmm, I don’t think there’s a problem either... Do you see any problems, house head?”

“Nothing. That man from Rock city is too nosey, why is he interfering with the future of Forest's Edge? Since he is a citizen of Rock city, he should pave roads from rocks until it reaches the edge of the world... Nevermind that. Hey, Asuta.”

After saying his thoughts unhappily, he looked up at me innocently.

He had the same expression as my house head when she wanted me to do something for her.

“Are you going to serve food to those city folks, but not cook for me?”

“No, I’m just here to ask for everyone’s opinion... Because of the position I’m in, I can’t just open a stall in the Post Station Town so haphazardly, right?”

“Who cares. The head of the Fa house is the one to decide, why are you asking us?”

“You are right. I just wanted to confirm if anyone in Forest's Edge will be unhappy about us opening a stall in the city... Also, I heard that the Tsun clan is in charge of liaising between Forest's Edge and the city. Can we open a stall in the town without going through them?”

“...The Tsun clan you say?”

Dan Lutim’s large eyes started to shine.

“Who cares about those retards! If they dare to complain, the Lutim house will make them suffer! Asuta, are you planning to make an enemy out of them?”

“Please don’t be so happy about that! We are here to discuss this because we don’t want to stir up any trouble!”

“Huh, boring.”

Dan Lutim switched gears into low energy mode again.

Kaslan Lutim said easily: “You don’t need to worry about that.”

“The Tsun clan is responsible for the communication between Forest's Edge and the Genos castle. If you want to open a stall inside those rock walls, you will need to go through the Tsun clan. There won’t be a problem if you set up shop in the Post Station Town.”



“Got it... Is doing this really not a violation of the rules or taboos of Forest's Edge?”

“You don’t need to worry. We can’t forage for food from the Morga mountains or farm the land and promised to never stop hunting kiba. These are the terms we agreed to in order to live in Forest's Edge. In other words, Rock city only permits us to sell kiba.”

“I see...”

“Asuta, this has no direct relation to you, but we are facing a troublesome situation.”

“Eh? What happened?”

“The meat— We can’t expend it all.”

It was rare to see an awkward smile appear on his face.

“The Wu clan used up a large amount of meat in that banquet, but house Lutim didn’t have that chance. We bloodlet and butchered two kiba a day, so even the food stores of the branch families are filled with meat. Since we are out of storage space, we will have to throw all that meat into the forest tomorrow.”

“Ah... There’s no other way.”

The meat from the kiba Ai Fa hunted was also piling up in the Fa house, and isn’t depleting at all. Even if we were to cover the meat with pico leaves, it could only be preserved for 15 to 20 days at most. We had no choice but to smoke them into jerky, but our stock of jerky was increasing too.

“If we could barter that meat for copper plates, our lives would be more prosperous. Furthermore— after realizing how delicious processed kiba meat is, we couldn’t bear seeing that meat turning into munto feed. Just the meat from the kiba we failed to bloodlet will be enough for the munto to have a great feast.”

“We will continue to bloodlet tomorrow! Even if the kiba meat keeps piling up, the ribs are still limited!”

The house head laughed heartily.

His son smiled sheepishly again, then nodded.

“...And so, we will need to abandon the meat other than the ribs into the forest. All of them had been bloodlet and eviscerated from the thigh, shoulders, and back.”

“Uwah, that’s such a pity!”

“That’s right. We can’t share this meat with the other houses. That will make the powerless houses give up on hunting kiba tusks and horns, and eat meat all day.”

Kaslan Lutim showed a serious expression and leaned forward.

“Asuta, we are planning to share the skills you taught us with the Min house, Lei house, and other kin houses. I think that all the denizens of Forest's Edge should learn these techniques in the future.”

“Eh? Including the Tsun clan?”

“Of course. If this can make them pick up their effort to hunt kiba again, then everything would end on a happy note.”

That was true. I wasn’t truly a member of Forest's Edge yet, and only thought of the Tsun clan as an “unforgivable enemy”.

“However, it’s too dangerous to do this right now. We can teach this skill to the large clans like the Tsun and the Wu, but not to the smaller houses.”

“Huh? But why?”

“Kiba meat is too delicious. The smaller houses have always had the thinking that [meat from the kiba’s body is unpalatable], but once they have a taste of properly prepared meat— As kiba is difficult to hunt, they might give up on the tusks and horns, and live on just kiba meat.”

Would that really happen?

Since meat from the kiba’s body had too strong of a stench, everyone was only willing to eat the thigh meat and did their best to hunt kiba. “Delicious meat”— would that really make them relax so much?

That wasn't impossible.

Since Kaslan Lutim said so, the possibility might exist.

I wasn't a hunter, so I couldn't blame those who were weak.

"I think that's the poison of wisdom."

"Poison of wisdom huh..."

"Yes, if you take in too much strong medicine, it will become a poison. Under such circumstances, I think your abilities will also become a poison."

When I heard him say that, my heart started to race.

My abilities will become a poison—

"I think this skill shouldn't be taught to the smaller houses that aren't kins of the Wu clan. When kiba meat can be exchanged for copper plates in the Post Station Town, they can then use meat to barter for aria and poitan and have a normal diet, lead a normal life and improve their capabilities as hunters."

"Yes..."

"When that time comes, your abilities will become normal medicine."

Kaslan Lutim showed a confident smile.

"Asuta, if the path that you and Ai Fa find will lead to opening a stall in the Post Station Town, I will wish for your success more than anyone else and do what I can to aid you— Because you two are my friends."

"Kaslan Lutim. Thank you... Very much. I will think about it tonight before making my decision. I will inform you of my choice then."

Was I worthy of being a friend of such a great man?

If I am not worthy now, I will have to work hard to be have this right.

When I met Kaslan Lutim for the first time that night— I never imagined that he will occupy such an important place in my heart.

The strings of fate work in a strange way. My meeting with Ai Fa led to my encounter with Rimee Wu. I then got to know the members of the Wu clan and became acquainted with Kaslan Lutim and Dan Lutim.

And Kamyua Yost—

Will that man become poison or medicine for Forest's Edge? Ai Fa and I had to make our judgment.

I made up my mind to have a long talk with Ai Fa.

“Kaslan Lutim, I’m very grateful. I’m glad that I discussed this with you.”

“I’m honored to hear that, Asuta... are you heading back already?”

“Yes, I’m sorry for intruding so many times today.”

“What, are you really going back!?”

Dan Lutim yelled.

“The sun is setting soon. The Fa house is very far, right? Why not stay the night at my place!?”

“I-I can’t trouble you so much...”

I then realized mid-sentence.

The journey home will take about an hour. It will be some time before it gets dark, but we won’t have time to dry the poitan.

I had not mastered the skill to make poitan in liquid form taste good yet, so I could either replace the poitan with the herb-like gigo or spend some time to cook poitan stew.

“Asuta, the women of house Lutim are still at the Wu clan. They only started learning

to cook from the Wu clan yesterday, so their techniques aren't refined yet... Will you please tend to our house's hearth tonight?"

Kaslan Lutim probably realized something from either his father or my expression and persuaded me to stay too.

"...Let me discuss with my house head."

I tried to make a straight face as I leaned near Ai Fa's ear.

"Ai Fa, if we eat dinner at home tonight, we will have no choice but to drink poitan soup."

Ai Fa nodded seriously, then whispered to me:

"Don't wanna."

And so, I became house Lutim's hearth caretaker tonight.

Part 6

Contrary to my expectations, the Lutim main house didn't have many people.

Aside from Dan Lutim, Kaslan Lutim and Ema Min Lutim, the only ones present were the previous house head Raa Lutim and the youngest sister Molun Lutim.

Dan Lutim actually had plenty of children. In addition to Kaslan Lutim and Molun Lutim, he had another son and two daughters, but they had all moved out with their spouses.

The second son of the Lutim house stayed right beside the main house and lived together with his wife and two children. The daughters were married off to a Wu branch house and the Lei house. Before Ema Min Lutim moved in, the Lutim house had only four people.

As the Lutim village had more men than women, everyone would work together to tend the hearth and perform other chores, and wouldn't be segregated by their houses.

"After all, only eleven of the Lutim house members are women. Normally, the females would outnumber the males."

"That shows how tough the men of the Lutim house are! And the people in the Wu main house all marry too late! They have seven scions, but only the eldest son had gotten a wife!"

Dinner at the Lutim house was very lively.

It was mostly because of the noisy house head.

The tall and skinny elderly man leading the Lutim house procession during the wedding was the former house head Tsu Lutim, the Grand Elder of the Lutim house. He was younger than seventy, bald, and wore a long white beard with sharp eagle eyes— He took in Grandma Jiba's daughter as his wife.

This was the first time I met with the youngest daughter of the Lutim house, Molun Lutim. She was fifteen years old, had a plump body, and had an adorable appearance.

Now that I think about it, she resembled her father. She was just fifteen, but she already had the air of a kind mother.

The grand elder didn't speak much, and everyone got along together noisily. It was a harmonious scene, worlds apart from the tense atmosphere in the Wu clan.

"I learned how to grill poitan today, but I couldn't cook for my family because I returned too late. Asuta, Ai Fa, you are a great help."

When we visited this morning, we already greeted Ema Min Lutim. She showed her trademarked calm smile.

Ema Min always had a pure and refreshing air about her. After the wedding, she seemed gentler and more mature than us.

She had cut her dark brown hair until it reached just the back of her neck. Such a bold short trim was a rare sight in Forest's Edge.

As a sign of marriage, her healthy and slender body was covered with one large piece of cloth.

"Ara, this is really delicious! I can't get tired of ribs no matter what, but the poitan you grilled is exceptionally tasty! After trying grilled poitan, normal poitan soup is impossible to drink!"

He was right, Ai Fa and I stayed in the Lutim house and tended to their hearth because we wanted to avoid drinking this poitan soup.

No matter what, dinner for tonight— ribs, thigh steak, grilled poitan, and kiba soup with aria and pula— was served.

After chatting for a while, everyone went back to their rooms to rest.

"Ai Fa, Asuta, do you want to sleep in the same room? We have two spare rooms right now."

"Yes, we have plenty of things to discuss."

I answered naturally. When the other party led us to our room, I felt a sudden

dissonance.

It was a three tatami big square room, without any furnishing.

The floor was covered with rugs, with a small folded pile of cloth at the innermost side of the room. That was the thing that made me feel that something was off.

“Ah, you need one more bedding; I will go to get it.”

After Molun Lutim who led us here said that, Ai Fa answered: “There’s no need.”

“It’s fine; we usually don’t use beddings.”

“I see. I’m going off then.”

Molun Lutim left with a smile.

We were assigned to the room on the rightmost edge of the house, right beside the newlywed couple.

“Ah... Does something feel off?”

“Why?”

Ai Fa entered the room quickly and placed the candle stand she borrowed by the window.

She then sat on the bedding.

The bedding was right beside the window, so her movement was very natural.

I closed the door behind me, walked to the other side of Ai Fa, and sat down on the rug.

Room for one person.

Bedding.

Someone else’s house.

Is that the reason? The distance between Ai Fa and me was the same as usual, but my heart started to race.

I decided to write “Serene heart” on my palm, then swallowed it.

“What are you doing?”

Ai Fa asked me in surprise, but I couldn’t answer her.

“We have gathered all sorts of information in these two days. Ai Fa, what are your thoughts about this?”

Ai Fa moaned for a moment, then untied her long hair.

She spoke as her golden locks flowed down her shoulders and chest:

“I think... there’s no problem.”

“That’s true.”

“Yes, even if the business fails, we will only lose our copper plates. I can make up for this by hunting kiba— fortunately, there’s a terrifying number of kiba during this season.”

“Yes.”

“I’m only worried about one thing. The one who suggested that we open a stall in the Post Station Town is Kamyua Yost.”

“It’s hard to place our trust in that man.”

“Instead of trust— it’s hard to understand him. I can’t grasp what he is thinking. The more I converse with him, the messier my head becomes.”

Ai Fa’s eyes were a little uneasy, and she leaned forward.

I wanted to back away on reflex, but luckily, I restrained myself.

Ai Fa came near me very naturally, if I shy away, it will make Ai Fa troubled and unhappy. If our roles were switched, I would feel really hurt.

But I still couldn't stay calm.

"That man ate kiba meat. I have never seen anyone from the city doing that. I was shocked and thought I would trust this man more— but I found him more suspicious instead."

"I see. I can't understand how you feel, but you have got that right. We can't understand him at all."

"Asuta, do you feel the same way too?"

"Yes."

"Oh... That's great."

Ai Fa sighed as if she had been relieved of a great burden on her heart.

She usually wouldn't show such a face.

"If our thoughts were different, I would think I couldn't understand you... I'm so glad."

"T-That's true. After listening to uncle Dora and Kaslan Lutim's advice, it seemed that opening a stall in the city wouldn't cause much trouble. We don't need to worry if Kamyua Yost has some ulterior intentions, we just need to do as we planned... Isn't that right?"

"I was planning to do just that. No matter what choice we made, the two of us will share the responsibility."

"But I don't want the stall to be a burden to you."

Ai Fa was calm, but she was showing a hint of anger now.

Her angry expression was more like Ai Fa's style, but that meant I said something wrong, right?

“Asuta, the ingredients in your stall will use the meat from the kiba I hunt, and ingredients bartered from the kiba tusks and horns, right?”

“Yes, I will use my money too, but I will need your help of course.”

“In that case, why are you separating our positions when you consider these things?”

I realized from her expression that she wasn’t angry, just anxious about something.

Her blue eyes were wavering as if she didn’t know what emotions she should be showing.

“When you decided to tend to the hearth for the Lutim wedding, you did it on an individual basis with Kaslan Lutim. This time, do you still have no intentions of opening the stall as a member of the Fa house? Do you still plan to shoulder the load alone? In that case— why do you call yourself a member of the Fa house?”

“I-I’m sorry. Do you think I’m too considerate? You know, I’m from a foreign country, so the way I treat my family will be a bit different from Forest's Edge. I didn’t mean to neglect you.”

I cast aside my whimsical thoughts from earlier and couldn’t help leaning forward.

We were about 30 cm apart. Ai Fa looked straight into my eyes as if she was probing.

“...When you are happy, I’m also happy.”

“Yes.”

“When you are sad, I will feel sad too.”

“Yes.”

“If not, why should we be family?”

Ai Fa averted her gaze quickly.

If the atmosphere had been relaxed like usual, Ai Fa would definitely be pouting now—but she was just whispering with her pink lips.

“If we can’t share everything, we don’t need to become family. Just why did you stay in the Fa house, instead of becoming a member of house Lutim?”

“Because I want to stay with you... Sorry, in my hometown, we have a habit of not troubling our family. I didn’t know my actions would make you so unhappy.”

In order to stop Ai Fa from showing such a sad face, I grabbed her hand.

Ai Fa’s fingertips weren’t that soft, but it was smooth. She gently grasped my hand.

“I want to go through joy and sorrow together with you. Our intentions are the same; please forgive me. I will pay more attention and not make you feel uncomfortable.”

“.....”

“Ai Fa, as time passes, we have gotten to know each other better, right? We might be from different countries or maybe even different worlds, but I hope our understanding of each other will improve.”

“...Do we have that much time?”

Ai Fa said quietly.

“I don’t know when I will succumb to the forest. You might disappear from this world at any moment... Do we have time to get to know each other?”

“We do. Until the moment we die or disappear, we will have time. We will continue to work hard, until the day we have to part.”

I gripped Ai Fa’s hand tightly, and she looked at me.

Her eyes that had yet to calm down stared at me.

“If we spend all day worrying about how much time we have, we will lose the will to work hard for the sake of tomorrow. I dislike living like that. Pondering about the current moment is important, but we shouldn’t neglect what might happen in the future.”

“Of course... I know that.”

The corner of her lips twitched for a moment.

She seemed to be smiling, or maybe crying— her expression was complicated and vague as if she couldn't even control her own emotions.

“Retard, I don't need you to tell me this now. If I hadn't even understood that, how could I have become a hunter?”

Ai Fa then did something unexpected.

She pressed her forehead hard onto my right shoulder.

“H-Hey, Ai Fa...?”

“Don't look at me right now. I will return to normal soon.”

She didn't cry like last time.

She just rested her forehead on my right shoulder and stopped moving.

Ai Fa's body warmth was transmitted to me from my shoulder and my fingers.

Her hair cascaded down to my crossed legs.

Although she wasn't using [sacrificial hunting style] recently, her hair still had a sweet fragrance.

A few seconds later—Ai Fa lifted her head steadily and shook off my fingers brusquely.

“...Asuta, what do you think?”

She kept her head lowered, her hair concealing her eyes.

From the lines of her mouth, I could tell she had her usual serious expression.

“I already shared with you my thoughts. Do you think we should open a stall in the Post Station Town?”

“Well, I... want to give it a try.”

Although I was worried about Ai Fa, I still answered frankly.

“I agree that we can’t perceive what Kamyua is thinking. I have never witnessed or experienced the impoverished life in Forest's Edge before, so I have no idea what it’s like. However... before I met Kamyua, I already felt indignant about the city people calling the denizens of Forest's Edge 《Kiba Eaters》. I want them to know how delicious kiba is.”

“Yes.”

“And there are still good people in the Post Station Town, like Tara and uncle Dora. Even if we can’t work harmoniously together, we can still try interacting with each other. I think opening the stall is a good chance to promote the relationship between Forest's Edge and the Post Station Town.”

I scratched my head.

“I’m just an outsider, is it really fine for me to be involved with the future of Forest's Edge? I’m troubled about that— opening a stall will affect the future of Forest's Edge, I hope that I can bring benefit to Forest's Edge by doing so. Since Kaslan Lutim and you agreed to this, I want to try and do it.”

“I see, you still think of yourself as an outsider. Your attitude really makes me angry sometimes.”

Ai Fa said coldly and turned her face away.

Her words and actions might have returned to normal, but her hair was still covering her eyes, so I couldn’t guess what she was feeling.

“You are a member of the Fa house. You are staying in Forest's Edge and living here. You have to express your thoughts from the perspective of a denizen of Forest's Edge.”

“Yes. Even from the perspective of a denizen of Forest's Edge, I still want to take up the challenge of opening a stall. I don’t know what the results would be, but I want to test the limits of my mettle.”

“...It’s decided then.”

Ai Fa kept her head turned and said quietly:

“I will hunt kiba as usual and prepare the meat and copper plates. You can use them to take care of your work.”

“I got it... I will do my best.”

“Hmmp, don’t neglect your work as a hearth caretaker just because you are serving food to the people in the city.”

“I will be selling the food, not giving out free treats.”

Since Ai Fa decided to revert to her usual attitude, I followed her lead.

I forced myself to answer cheerfully:

“That said, after deciding on opening the stall, there will be a mountain of problems for me to worry about. Aside from the ingredients we have on hand, we also need to calculate the cost of other ingredients. How will we transport the ingredients and iron pot to the Post Station Town? That is a difficult problem. It’s not as easy as it sounds.”

“So you have thought that far. Asuta, leaving the opinions of others aside, did you actually really want to open a stall, right?”

“Not really. I’m just having fun imagining it. Looks like I will have plenty to discuss with Kaslan Lutim tomorrow.”

“You are so pragmatic.”

With those words, Ai Fa laid down on the bedding.

In the end, she still wanted to sleep on the bedding. I smiled wryly.

“I will organize my thoughts properly. Since we have decided to take up the challenge of opening a stall, I will definitely make it work.”

When I was about to lie down on the rug, Ai Fa who was lying down on the bedding

called out to me.

“Asuta.”

“What is it?”

After my answer, she propped up her upper body with her elbow and scooted a little towards the wall.

“This bedding is unexpectedly soft and really comfortable. Come here to rest too.”

“...What?”

I tilted my head anxiously.

Ai Fa laid down again and extended both her arms:

“It’s really comfortable. They went through the trouble of preparing the bedding for us; it would be a waste not to use it.”

“N-No need, please enjoy it yourself. As long as there are rugs on the floor, I can sleep comfortably.”

“...Don’t you believe me?”

“It’s not like that. The people in my country also use bedding. I know how comfortable it is to lie on one.”

“Since you know, then come over.”

“No, no. The bedding isn’t big enough for the two of us. Don’t mind me, good night.”

“...Why are you so adamant about rejecting me?”

Ai Fa muttered quietly as she laid still.

“Did I do anything to make you unhappy?”

“That’s not it! In my country, only parent and child, or wedded couples sleep in the

same bedding.”

“...This is Forest's Edge, not your country.”

Uwah, I started stammering and couldn't say anything.

I didn't know if Ai Fa intentionally covered her eyes with her long hair, which made it hard to tell what she was thinking.

If her eyes didn't revert to her usual calm and kept wavering uneasily— just that thought pained my heart.

This had to be some sort of test.

Really, I already had enough of such trials!

“...If you are that unwilling, then do what you want.”

Ai Fa turned towards the wall, hiding her face from me.

It was time for me to make my decision.

However— No matter what I thought, I knew very well that Ai Fa wouldn't let me marry into the Fa house. There was no way anything would happen between us.

We had always been sleeping together, and we were very close to each other too. I was only so conscious of this fact because there was the bedding on the floor. Now that I think about it, even if I lie on this bedding with Ai Fa, the distance between us would just be tens of cm closer than usual. Enduring this distance would put Ai Fa at ease, so I didn't need to be that hesitant about this.

I steadied my breathing, did my best to calm my heart, then crawled to the bedding.

“Excuse me.”

Ai Fa didn't move.

I tried my best to not look at Ai Fa's beautiful back and laid gently on the bedding.

This bedding had just the right softness and felt really comfortable. I really missed having a pillow, but I couldn't be picky here. As I thought about the plan to open a stall in the Post Station Town, I closed my eyes and decided to sleep early.

The next instant, Ai Fa turned her body towards me.

"...Asuta, you still came over in the end."

"Y-Yeah, you invited me after all."

Ai Fa rested her head on her right arm, laid on the rug sideways and stared at me.

There wasn't any sadness or unease in her eyes, but instead they were filled with joy.

"...You should have listened to me obediently from the start."

I couldn't joke with her right after seeing her honest display of happiness.

Ai Fa's face was very expressive and would either be angry, sulking, or pouty towards me. But it was rare to see her show joy— Maybe this was the first time I have seen her like this since I first met her.

As I was panicking because of Ai Fa, she spoke quietly:

"Asuta, in terms of cooking, you are immeasurably powerful. But we have no way of knowing if opening the shop in the Post Station Town will have a happy ending like what Kaslan Lutim predicts."

"Yes... You are right."

"No matter what, I won't regret this. You just need to do what you usually do."

"Yes, I plan to do that."

"...I'm proud of you, happy to have met you and take you in as a member of the Fa house."

Ai Fa closed her eyes.

She had a blissful smile on her face.

“I’m going to sleep. Let’s talk tomorrow...”

A steady breathing came from beside me mid-sentence.

Ai Fa’s face looked as naive as a child, and looked at ease.

...That’s my line.

I thought in my mind, but I couldn’t move my gaze away from her lovable face or close my eyes, so I ended up staying up all night.

Chapter 3

The Day of Deep Thinking

Part 1

The Fa house has decided to open a stall in the Post Station Town. Even though the decision had been made, we still had a mountain of things to consider. As there were too many issues to address, I didn't know where to start.

After thinking about it carefully, I summarized them into three main issues.

The points were as follows—

One, could we balance work and house chores?

Two, how would we transport the goods?

Three, what was the sales target?

I need to figure out these three questions before I could work on the menu.

To be honest, I already got a gist of the menu, and just needed to work out my plan based on which dish I would be serving.

First, could we balance work and house chores?

My schedule had not been consistent lately, but my tasks were centered around dawn and dusk. Till now, I used the time around noon to practice my cooking, so it wouldn't be a problem if I filled this time to commute to work and open the stall.

However, if I were to spend too much time on preparing the food, I would need to shorten my operation time.

In order to run the business smoothly, I had to think of an airtight plan.

Next was how to transport the items.

This was a difficult one.

Since I wanted to sell steaming hot food, I had to bring the iron pot and firewood to the Post Station Town. I needed someone to help me, but it couldn't be Ai Fa.

Ai Fa was a hunter, after all, so she needed to hunt and couldn't stay in the Post Station Town for long. If she were to help me ferry the goods, she would need to make two trips to the Post Station Town. A one-way journey from Forest's Edge to the Post Station Town required an hour. I couldn't let her neglect her hunting work for such a menial chore.

And so— that's where things started to get interesting. I had to hire someone to [work].

No matter what, it was too risky to tend the stall by myself. I would need to leave the stall because of miscellaneous matters from time to time, and leaving the stall unattended in the Post Station Town where people discriminate against Forest's Edge was dangerous. There might be ruffians hostile towards the denizens of Forest's Edge who would sneak into the stall.

Hence, I needed to get at least one more person to help.

Finally, how should we set the sales target?

That was another tough question. I think it would be good enough not to lose money. Considering our long-term goal, the price of the merchandise couldn't be too low.

One of our goals was “let the people in the Post Station Town recognize the value of kiba meat”, we hoped that kiba meat could have comparable value with the other meat sold in the Post Station Town.

If not, we would disrupt the market prices.

If we set the price of kiba meat too low, it might force the other meat stalls to the brink.

And so, I arrived at a conclusion. No matter what my profits were, I would sell a product at the same size and volume as a “Kimyusu meat bun”.

The last thing to consider would be the calculation of ingredient cost and profits.

In order to ask Kaslan Lutim for his opinion, I visited his room with the above plan early in the morning. I didn't expect my actions to make him so confused.

"Asuta, I'm sorry. I don't understand at all..."

"Eh? What don't you understand?"

"I get what you are saying, but even if you ask me about revenue, price and working hours— I'm at a loss too, and don't know how to help you."

It seemed that I explained too many unnecessary things.

Even if I asked him about operation hours and price setting, he couldn't do anything about it, so I just needed to worry about them by myself.

"Sorry, you are right. I'm here to discuss with you about getting helpers to tend to the stall. If I want to open a stall in the Post Station Town, I will need helpers. I can't transport a pot full of ingredients alone, and I also want someone to look after the stall at times. So I will need the help of the women in Forest's Edge. I can use kiba tusks and horns to compensate them for their time and effort."

Kaslan Lutim's serious face showed signs of hesitation.

I have never seen him make such an expression.

"That shouldn't be a problem. But won't Ai Fa be with you after opening your stall in the Post Station Town?"

"Eh? No, Ai Fa is a hunter, she has her own work to attend to, so she can't help me. If Ai Fa were to stop hunting kiba, we would lose everything."

"If you earn copper plates in the Post Station Town, you can exchange them for aria and poitan, right?"

"Only if my business is successful. If the business were to fail, we would lose all our savings. Besides, we will need to hunt kiba to get the meat for the stall."

“House Lutim can provide meat for you. Like I said yesterday, we have piles of meat and can’t use them all.”

“Alright, when the business gets on track, I will be counting on you for that. But what we need right now are copper plates, we need them to buy the vegetables required for the dishes.”

I wasn’t sure why Kaslan Lutim had such a reaction, but I continued:

“It might not be easy to sell kiba meal in the Post Station Town, so it’s better to plan for the worst. It’s even possible to have no sales within these ten days. If that were to happen, we would lose all the tusks and horns Ai Fa had earned so far. And so, I think Ai Fa should continue hunting— and most important of all, Ai Fa has no intention of giving up her job as a hunter.”

Ai Fa who was beside me nodded.

Kaslan Lutim sighed softly.

“That’s true. Asuta, you are right. You already set your mind on opening a stall in the Post Station Town and will go as far as to risk losing all your horns and tusks in order to achieve this goal. My thinking is too shallow... Unfortunately, house Lutim is short on women help, and we even need to get other houses to lend us their aid. Like I mentioned yesterday, house Lutim doesn’t have many women...”

“I see, then I will need to discuss this with the Wu clan— considering Donda Wu’s temperament, he will probably turn me down. If we really can’t find any helpers, my only option will be to sell food that I can carry alone.”

“That won’t do.” “No way.” The two of them said at the same time.

“W-Why not?”

Ai Fa who was beside me closed in on me angrily.

“Think about it carefully, if the business succeeds, can you walk around in the Post Station Town with copper plates on you? if the ruffians in the Post Station Town were to attack you, would you be able to protect yourself?”

“Eh... You are correct. But the women in Forest's Edge also need to buy things in the Post Station Town, right? If they are fine, then I...”

“...Do you think you are stronger than the women of Forest's Edge?”

I was dealt a huge blow.

I might not be as strong as Mama Mia Lei, but I wouldn't lose to Leina Wu or Lala Wu—at least I hoped so.

“Ai Fa is right. Even if you are stronger than the women of Forest's Edge, going about alone in the Post Station Town is still very dangerous.”

“W-Why, Kaslan Lutim?”

“In the Post Station Town, no one dares to use violence against the denizens of Forest's Edge. It's the same for the elderly, women and children. The people in the city already learned what will happen to them if they laid a hand on the denizens of Forest's Edge— we have already proven this point decades ago.”

Kaslan Lutim's tone was calm, but his words were intimidating.

Could it be— something incredibly terrifying happened several decades ago?

“...However, even though you wear the garbs of a denizen of Forest's Edge, your appearance is closer to the people in the city. If the ruffians in the Post Station Town were to think you are not a real denizen of Forest's Edge, you would be in danger.”

“I see...”

“Furthermore, you might run into the people from the Tsun clan in the Post Station Town. Compared to the ruffians in the Post Station Town, I'm more worried about them.”

After Kaslan Lutim said that, Ai Fa nodded firmly.

“I already considered this possibility— but even the depraved Tsun clan won't use violence openly in broad daylight when they are in the Post Station Town, right?”

“...Didn’t the second son of the Tsun clan Doddo Tsun brandish his saber in broad daylight that other time in the Post Station Town? During my wedding day, he also drew his blade against us.”

“Well... You are right... But if he really were to hurt anyone with his blade, he would be punished too, right?”

“That is only natural. Both the city’s law and the rules of Forest's Edge forbid the act of drawing one’s blade and hurting others. Anyone who breaches this rule will have to pay for his crime with his life.”

Kaslan Lutim leaned forward unconsciously.

“If anything were to happen to you and the criminal is executed, that still won’t solve anything. We can’t exchange the life of a ruffian for your wellbeing.”

Kaslan Lutim’s eyes were troubled, and Ai Fa’s raging gaze made me realized how naive I was.

I was too unaware of the dangers.

“Of course, no matter how lawless the people of the Tsun clan is, they won’t commit such grievous crime so easily in public. They know this will lead to their own destruction... But Asuta, think about it. During your daily commute to the Post Station Town, there will be plenty of chances for others to attack you. If the ruffians were to ambush you during your journey from Forest's Edge to the Post Station Town—”

“W-Wait, even if I were to be in the company of women from the Lutim or Wu clan, our position would still be precarious, right?”

“No, the Tsun clan don’t have the guts to do so right now. If any kin of the Wu clan is harmed, all the pent-up rage Donda Wu is bottling up will explode.”

I noticed there is a stern light in Kaslan Lutim’s eyes that I have never seen before.

“If that happens, the Tsun clan will be destroyed, and the Wu clan’s kin will suffer heavy losses— And it will be only a matter of time before the Forest's Edge settlement gets wiped out.”

“...Yes.”

“The head of the Tsun clan knows Donda Wu’s temperament very well. He is probably very unhappy that his sons taunted the Wu clan. After all, the head of the Tsun clan’s goal is to protect his own stable life.”

“...Those people actually barged into the wedding under such a situation.”

“Yes, they are too retarded, even going against their clan head’s will.”

This was the first time I heard this earnest young man showed scold someone so plainly.

I experienced many things for the first time this morning.

“According to my observations, even if the three sons from the Tsun clan are incredibly retarded, they still have no intention of bringing Forest's Edge towards destruction. The second son Doddo Tsun only brandished his blade during the wedding to intimidate you. I already said this before, but the Fa house isn’t a kin of the Wu clan. So the Tsun clan will lose control very easily when they face the Fa house.”

“Yes...”

“Since Ai Fa is capable of protecting you, I don’t think the Tsun clan would be a threat to you two. But Ai Fa can’t move together with you this time— You can only rely on Donda Wu. If you can afford to pay and hire the women from the Wu clan, they would be able to ensure your safety.”

“I see... So there won’t be any danger if I employ the women from the Wu clan? I’m not worried about myself, but for the safety of the women from the Wu clan.”

“No— I can bet my life on that. After all, I’m the most unwilling to see Forest's Edge head towards destruction.”

Kaslan Lutim’s eyes showed no hesitation at all.

Unlike the careless me, Kaslan Lutim was a great man, he wouldn’t show any openings to the Tsun clan. His unwavering eyes made me believe that.

This steeled my heart even more, but Ai Fa was still glaring angrily at me from the side.

“Asuta, you are too careless and don’t think about protecting yourself properly. I won’t let a frail man like you leave Forest's Edge alone.”

“Stop emphasizing me being weak. I know that very well...”

“It can’t be helped. Hunters will hunt, hearth tenders will take care of the hearth. The Wu clan and Lutim house have their own responsibilities too, which is to be on guard against the Tsun clan’s violent acts. The Fa house’s duty is to open a stall in the Post Station Town— We might not be related by blood, but for the sake of a more prosperous life for everyone, we need to make up for each others shortcoming. That’s how things should be.”

Kaslan Lutim finally smiled.

“Ai Fa, is it the Fa house’s style to shoulder everything by themselves and not to rely on others? In that case, then you and Asuta are really alike. Both of you have no regards for your own well-being for the sake of achieving your goals.”

Kaslan Lutim was a great man as expected.

After all— Ai Fa pouted her lips vexingly after hearing that.

This was the first time I have seen Ai Fa showed such a face to someone else.

While I was impressed by Kaslan Lutim magnanimity— something akin to jealousy welled up in my heart.

Just how narrow-minded was I? I could only sigh at myself.

Part 2

Before noon, we estimated the time Donda Wu would rise from bed, and left the Lutim house.

With our new pot in tow, we set off together with Kaslan and his wife.

“I want to see Kota Wu.” Ema Min Lutim used this reason and asked us to take her along.

“Didn’t you visit the Wu clan village yesterday?”

“I went to learn cooking and didn’t see Kota Wu.”

“But you will be visiting the Wu clan to learn cooking later too, right?”

“That’s right. All the women are attending; if I miss out, I would be the worst cook in house Lutim. Kaslan, are you fine with that?”

“But...”

“Also, if we don’t go to the Wu clan together, I will only see you at dinner. If you are okay with that, I can go back to house Lutim now.”

“I-I’m not saying you should go back.”

In these thirty minutes, we had the rare chance to listen to the conversation between newlyweds.

I could only say that I was envious.

We reached the Wu village as we chatted.

There might have been only three days since the wedding, but it seemed like it happened such a long time ago.

The women in the branch houses were doing all sort of chores. Upon seeing us, they all waved.

I spent six days in this village after all, so this was like my second home.

“Ara ara, what’s the occasion, you are actually visiting us together! Even bringing a pot too! The feast is already over, isn’t it?”

Mama Mia Lei received us cheerfully at the main house.

She seemed surprised and intrigued and had a happy smile on her face. Her smile felt very nostalgic.

“I’m here to discuss something with Donda Wu. Is he awake?”

“Ah, he is chewing on jerky in the hall. Jiza and Ludo are with him... I will safekeep your blades, can you put the pot around here, please?”

“Alright.”

Mama Mia Lei took Ai Fa and Kaslan Lutim’s sabres and also my Santoku knife with her strong arms.

“Alright then, welcome to the Wu clan... Clan head, you have guests!”

After entering through the door, we found the clan head and his sons sitting opposite to each other in the center of the hall.

“Hmm, Asuta, it’s you! What brings you here!?”

Ludo Wu stood up nimbly when he noticed my presence.

Only then did the clan head and his heir turn their heads slowly our way.

They— seemed rather unhappy.

“What, it’s you damn brats again. Nothing good ever comes from seeing you.”

Kaslan Lutim bowed towards Donda Wu. The other party was obviously displeased, almost to the point of being hostile.

“Head of the Wu clan Donda Wu, sorry for intruding, but could we have a bit of your time?”

Donda who was in the seat of honor snorted, then sat up straight.

Jiza Wu and Ludo Wu also sat down opposite to us.

“Mia Lei Wu, I want to visit Sati Lei Wu and Kota Wu, are they in?”

“They are in their rooms. That’s right, let’s leave the troublesome matters to the men.”

After Mama Mia Lei placed our blades beside the clan head, she walked along the corridor to the right together with Ema Min Lutim.

“It’s almost time for everyone to head into the Forest, so I will be brief... The Fa house wanted the Lutim house to help with a job. But our house didn’t have means to do it, so we are here together to request for assistance from the Wu clan.”

“...A job?”

“That’s right— Asuta, please explain.”

“Alright. I will be frank; I’m planning to open a stall in the Post Station Town.”

“What!?”

Ludo Wu shouted in surprise.

“What is this about! Hey, Asuta! Are you leaving Forest's Edge!?”

“No, I’m planning to set up a stall to sell kiba meat meals as a denizen of Forest's Edge... People might think this is ridiculous, but we have made up our mind. I’m here to discuss this with everyone... Because I hope the Wu clan will let me borrow a woman to help me.”

Donda Wu already had a displeased face, so his expression didn’t change much.

Jiza Wu’s thoughts were as elusive as ever.

Ludo Wu— started laughing out loud.

“What? You want the people from the city to eat kiba? The people who mock and call us 《kiba eater》? You really are an interesting man! How did you come up with such an outrageous idea?”

“That’s complicated and will take a lot of time to explain... Donda Wu, what are your thoughts about this?”

“...Is this your idea?”

Donda Wu went straight to the point.

I straightened my back unconsciously.

“No. The one who suggested for me to do that was Kamyua Yost, the citizen of Rock City from last time.”

“I knew it. Did that fool show up at the Fa house as promised?”

“Yes. But I didn’t collude with him on this. When he gave this suggestion, I couldn’t understand what his intentions were. After hearing him out, I realized that running a stall wasn’t impossible, and decided to give it a shot.”

I thought Donda Wu would react more strongly.

If I had to say— Jiza Wu who was sitting quietly at the side started emitting a dangerous aura instead.

“After I treated him to a meal at the Fa house, he commented that kiba was delicious, and it was a pity not to sell it. If we can barter kiba meat for copper plates, the lives of Forest’s Edge denizens will be more prosperous. In order to let the people in the city understand how delicious kiba meat is, I need to open a stall in the Post Station Town— that’s the conclusion I arrived at after our discussion. I also visited the Post Station Town to conduct plenty of research, and check if this incredible proposal is really feasible.”

Repeating what I told Kaslan Lutim yesterday, I explained my thoughts and feelings of the past two days.

Even if we sold kiba food in the Post Station Town, it wouldn’t upset people too much.

If it works, we might really be able to pull this off in the Post Station Town.

I still couldn't understand Kamyua Yost, but it was true that he admired the denizens of Forest's Edge and had no intentions of deceiving us.

"What an elusive man. But your cooking is really delicious! I can't wait to see the faces made by the city people when they try kiba meat!"

"Shut up, Ludo."

Donda Wu snapped at him.

He wasn't in a good mood, but his expression remained calm.

He might actually agree to this— just when I was thinking that, Jiza Wu called my name:

"Asuta, you look just like a man from the city, and it wouldn't be strange for you to do business in town... Why don't you become a Post Station Town citizen, wouldn't that simplify the matter?"

"Jiza Wu, I know how you feel. I also answered you before that I like Forest's Edge. Given two choices - either remaining in Forest's Edge or opening the stall, I would choose Forest's Edge."

"Hehe."

I heard a strange noise, and when I shifted my gaze, I found Ludo Wu laughing while facing away.

He had an incredibly cheerful smile on his face.

"...What a joke."

Donda Wu muttered.

"I don't think the people in Rock city will eat kiba happily, trying to barter kiba meat for copper plates is a ridiculous idea."

"Yes. I can't imagine earning any profits from the stall. But I still want to give it a shot."

I leaned forward a little and stared at Donda Wu's chiseled face.

"Just Ai Fa and I alone can't run a stall in the Post Station Town. We will need helpers to operate the stall, and I have been advised that it is too dangerous for me to move around in the Post Station Town alone. I might also run into the Tsun clan, so it is better for me to enlist the help from the kin of the Wu clan.— After listening to my words, will you please consider this?"

"Hmmp..."

"I won't ask you to believe that this business will be successful. Be it success or failure I will pay the agreed remuneration. After discussing with Kaslan Lutim, I have set six copper plates as the wage for one day of work— which is one tusk and one horn of a large kiba."

I heard that two women needed half a day to make one piece of fur. The price of the fur was equivalent to two tusks and horns— between eight to twelve copper plates.

Kamyua Yost said that the tusks and horns from one kiba were worth ten copper plates. After checking with Ai Fa and the others, I found out that the price of the tusks and horns would differ according to their sizes.

I needed a woman to help me for half a day, so I thought the price I was offering matched the market price.

"As the Fa house and the Tsun clan have had some bad blood in the past, please take that into consideration too. Kaslan Lutim told me that the Tsun clan won't lay their hands on me as long as a kin from the Wu clan is with me. However, Doddo Tsun is reckless, and I can't be sure what he will do if he gets drunk."

"You don't need to tell me that, brat... Don't look down on the women from the Wu clan."

"Clan head."

Jiza Wu was stopped mid-sentence by Donda Wu.

"If I lend you my woman for half a day, you will give me one horn and tusk. That's not a bad deal. The Wu clan does have the people to spare."

“Yes.”

“I have a condition.”

“A condition?”

“If you conspire with that retarded blonde man to harm Forest's Edge, I will take your right arm.”

I felt a chill running down my spine.

I wasn't looking Ai Fa's way, but I could feel murderous intent from her.

“If you agree to this, I will lend you a helper.”

“...I don't have any malicious intentions, but I'm not sure about Kamyua Yost.”

“If that man has any schemes, I will lop off his head. If you collude with him, I will cut off your right arm.”

A heavy silence shrouded the hall.

I gulped.

“I'm willing to swear that aside from the thoughts and feelings I described earlier, I have no other intentions— However, if Kamyua Yost does have ulterior motives, I won't be able to prove my innocence when his schemes are uncovered.”

“I don't need you to be a smart alec. If you got fooled by him, I will just laugh at you for being retarded... Kaslan Lutim, head of the Fa house.”

“Yes.”

Kaslan Lutim answered quietly. Ai Fa was silent as she glared at Donda Wu.

An angry fire burned in her eyes.

“Do you believe what this brat is saying?”

“Of course. If I didn't, I wouldn't have come.”

“What about you, head of the Fa house?”

“...Isn’t it obvious? As the house head, how can I not trust my own family?”

Her voice was trembling with rage.

Donda Wu was unusually calm in front of Ai Fa.

“If the two of them believe in your innocence until the very end, I will let you off. If they are certain that you have betrayed Forest's Edge, I will take your right arm.”

“I accept this term.”

I wiped away the cold sweat on my brows and answered:

“I vow to never betray the denizens of Forest's Edge.”

“Will you swear on your right arm?”

“I do, I swear on my right arm.”

The next instant, Ai Fa proclaimed loudly:

“Hold it; the Fa house is the one that decided to open a stall in the Post Station Town, not Asuta. If anything happens, the house head should be responsible.”

Ai Fa’s cat-like eyes burned with an intense flame.

Donda Wu stared at her silently.

“If I do anything against my conscience, I will give you my arm.”

“Hey, Ai Fa—”

“Head of the Fa house, I don’t need your arm.”

Donda Wu cut me off sternly.

“Someone like you won’t collude with the people of Rock city. But this brat came from a foreign land, I just want to know his true intentions and resolve.”

“But...”

“Didn’t he give his answer? I only want to know whether he will attempt to deceive us. He won’t lose his right arm unless he betrays us.”

The light in Donda Wu’s eyes intensified a little as he stared at the furious Ai Fa.

“He already made his resolve, are you going to trample over his efforts...? Or do you actually doubt him?”

Ai Fa tried to stand up.

I grabbed her arm in a panic.

“Calm down, Ai Fa. I won’t betray the denizens of Forest’s Edge; it will be fine.”

This was probably an unnecessary precaution.

Donda Wu was the head of the Wu clan’s main house and had the future of Forest’s Edge resting on his shoulders. He shouldn’t believe me so easily.

Even so, he was willing to let Kaslan Lutim and Ai Fa judge me.

Ai Fa and Kaslan Lutim were his tribe mates from Forest’s Edge. Even if he didn’t trust me, he could trust them—I felt that Donda Wu’s decisiveness was very straight to the point.

However... Donda Wu always hid his intentions with crude words, which I think was a bad point.

Even so, I still understood his actions.

Ai Fa glared at me for a moment, then sat down again.

She lowered her head to conceal her agitated emotions and eyes and bit on her lower lips.

“...Looks like we have a deal.”

Donda Wu muttered.

“Well then, who shall we send to help you—”

“Ah, the job includes transporting the ingredients and iron pot, as well as tending to the stall. My helper will need to be capable of traversing the hilly terrain with the ingredients and pot.”

“Hmmp...”

“Women from the main or branch houses are fine; I will leave the choice to you.”

As I was speaking, my heart turned gloomy.

I had yet to meet Leina Wu and Vena Wu since the wedding.

Vena Wu asked me to take her along and journey to a faraway place.

Leina Wu wanted me to leave the Fa house and become a member of the Wu clan.

I could fulfill neither of these two wishes.

I didn’t want to avoid them forever and hoped to build a stable relationship with them again. Unfortunately, I still didn’t know how.

Who would he dispatch? My heart raced as I waited for his answer— Donda Wu finally said:

“Let’s send Vena then.”

Part 3

After a series of events, this was my third visit to the Post Station Town.

I was talking with Donda Wu in the Wu main house just a short time earlier.

After leaving the Fa house yesterday, we visited house Lutim, went to the Post Station Town, returned to house Lutim again and stayed the night there. The next day, I'm here at the Post Station Town after visiting the Wu clan— my itenary was fully pack for these two days.

I visited the Post Station Town two days in a row.

I had slowly gotten used to the messy streets.

Ai Fa wasn't with me today.

The Lutim house marriage was already three days ago, Ai Fa had to hunt the forest today, so she went home alone with the iron pot.

And accompanying me in her place— were Vena Wu and Ludo Wu.

An unexpected trio.

"Hee hee, it's been so long since I came to the Post Station Town! This place is still so stifling!"

Ludo Wu said excitedly.

"I like the Post Station Town... But, I don't like how everyone stares at me, it's a bit unnerving..."

Vena Wu was all smiles too.

On the night of the wedding, when we were together in the stove room of Shin Wu's house, Vena Wu begged me in tears not to be together with Leina Wu. Her figure back then was still fresh on my mind— and Vena Wu was walking beside her brother on the stone paved path right now, her face showing a more cheerful and pure smile than

usual.

On the other hand, I felt a bit tired.

In order to execute the plan in my mind, I had to visit the Post Station Town again. As Ai Fa couldn't accompany me, Donda Wu lended me two members of the Wu clan. I was grateful for Donda Wu's help, but he had a condition; he wanted me to introduce Kamyua Yost to the two of them.

As Kamyua Yost was too hard to understand, Donda Wu probably wanted the two of them to get to know his thoughts as much as possible.

Would the meeting between them and Kamyua Yost end smoothly? I was worried.

"L-Ludo Wu, don't you need to do your work as a hunter?"

After asking that, Ludo Wu said that the Wu clan won't be entering the forest today.

The reason was simple— there were kiba everywhere in the forest.

With the increase in the number of kiba, the Wu clan already hunted enough for two days during their trip yesterday. A few men from the branch family and Darum Wu also suffered light wounds.

They already lost Ryada Wu, so they couldn't afford to be reckless and risk losing more hunters. Hence, everyone gets to rest for a day, and not hunt kiba— we just happened to arrive when the Wu clan reached this conclusion.

The situation in the Wu clan was even more dire than house Lutim.

This made me worry about Ai Fa who went into the forest today, but the brave huntress from my house wasn't fazed as expected.

"This probably meant that the kiba group is slowly moving south. There are only smaller houses in our vicinity, so they couldn't hunt all the kiba. After the kiba eats all the food in the area, they will continue moving down south."

"I see..."

“When they had eaten all the food in the south, they will head to village and ravage the farms. This might be a worse disaster than usual.”

Ai Fa was calm, but angry flame burned in her blue eyes.

“I can only do what what I can to hunt the kiba and do my job... Asuta, go and do your job too.”

“I got it.”

Ai Fa and I act separately.

I headed to the Post Station Town with the eldest daughter and the youngest son from the Wu clan—

“Uwah, that’s a Totos, a Totos! It looks as funny as ever! Asuta, what does the Totos taste like?”

“L-Ludo Wu, don’t be so loud.”

“Asuta... I never thought that I would get to work with you for ten days in a row, this is like a dream... Thank you for giving me such a wonderful job...”

“T-This is work alright? You have to work properly okay? Please keep private and work matters apart!”

We just reached the Post Station Town, when the two of them started talking loudly.

The gazes on us were different from the previous two times I visited.

By the way, Ludo Wu was wearing his cape and dressed like a hunter as usual. Vena Wu had a different attire today. She had a translucent veil on her head, a shawl covered her shoulders and a cloth with swirly patterns covered her waist down to her ankles.

“Girls have to be careful. The people in the city aren’t our tribe mates, I can’t bare my skin before them...”

Her effort was commendable, but regrettably, such a thin piece of cloth couldn’t conceal Vena Wu’s thicc figure.

Her deep cleavage was very visible, and the slit down the cloth covering her waist revealed the beautiful curves on her legs, which was even sexier than baring them—the lusty eyes of the men were centered on her, surpassing those of disdain and fear.

“I don’t know if we will see those retards from the Tsun clan, but if they draw their blades in front of me, I will break their arms!”

“Don’t! Ludo Wu, please don’t make a scene!”

“What? You think I’m a retard who will create a trouble without being provoked?”

He wasn’t retarded, but he fulfilled all the conditions of starting trouble.

Ludo Wu was loud, have big movements and attract a lot of attention. But Vena Wu was on par with him.

However— I was happy about a certain quality Ludo Wu has.

In Forest's Edge, Ludo Wu was a carefree youth. He left a good impression on me, and I had never thought he was noisy or undependable. Instead, I think he had many good points, lively and pure.

The buildings and people in the Post Station Town were more densely pack, so for Ludo Wu, this town was too cramped.

He needed a big space for him to spread his limbs.

“Wah, it’s people from Semu! They are still so black! I wonder if he knows magic.”

But I really wish he wouldn’t point at pedestrians and shout!

“L-Let’s go! Let’s meet Kamyua first!”

I had to drag those two and hurried towards the 《Kimyusu’s tail inn》 .

“Really now... Ludo, you are too loud, that makes us even more prominent...”

“What are you talking about Vena-nee! It’s because of the flirty way you walk!”

“Don’t say that, Asuta will hear you...”

This was probably the first time I hear them converse properly.

This scene calmed me down a little, but I still prefer enjoying such a heart warming interaction in Forest's Edge.

“Welcome... Oh, it’s you again.”

The owner of 《Kimyusu’s tail inn》 — I remember his name was Milano Mast— received us with a sour face again.

“Oh~ so this is an inn.”

Ludo Wu looked around the room curiously. His actions made me nervous, and I asked:

“Is Kamyua Yost here?”

“No. He left early in the morning. I don’t know if he left for work or pleasure.”

He wasn’t here.

I felt relieved, but I was in a dilemma. I couldn’t carry out my promise with Donda Wu now.

At this moment, the boy Leito came out from inside the restaurant like he did last time.

“Asuta, you came to visit again...! And they are?”

“They are denizens from Forest's Edge, Vena Wu and Ludo Wu from the Wu clan.”

“I see, they are from the Wu clan.”

Leito smiled.

Seemed like Kamyua already told him their names.

“...And who are you?”

Ludo Wu squinted a little.

“Ah, I’m Leito, Kamyua’s disciple. Pleased to meet you both.”

“Disciple in what?”

“Disciple in being a 《Guardian》 of course.”

I still don’t understand the entire scope of Kamyua Yost’s job, but since he needed to ensure the safety of travelers, he probably gets embroiled into fights a lot.

“Kamyua is out to discuss details about a job next month. He left early in the morning, and won’t be back too lack.”

“I see. I will come over to find him after we finish buying our things.”

After giving this reply, I turned to Milano Mast who had turned his face to the side.

I had business with him today.

“Excuse me, Kamyua told me that this place handles the market place rental, and the lease of pushcarts. Can you lease a pushcart to me?”

“What?”

Milano Mast turned and faced me.

“If you are willing to pay, I will lease you my pushcart. What will you be selling?”

“I want to sell food made from kiba meat.”

The next moment, the man grunted unhappily.

“I don’t care what you are selling, but don’t make my pushcart stink, or I will force you to buy it. Can you accept that?”

“I will be selling food, so there will be some smell. Does this rule apply to the other renters too?”

“It’s fine if you sell Kimyusu or karon. But if the stench of the kiba gets on the pushcart, it can’t be used again.”

He mentioned an unfamiliar term in his reply.

What was a karon?

“You are really naggy, uncle! You don’t know how delicious kiba is, so don’t say so much alright? If you got a problem, then try eating some kiba first.”

Milano raised his thick eyebrow when he heard what Ludo Wu said.

“Then have you eaten karon or kimyusu before? You only think the stinky kiba is delicious because you have never tried them. If you don’t want to hear me nag, then don’t bring that meat into town!”

Even though Ludo Wu didn’t seem to be bothered, I felt that I should intervene.

“I’m sorry, but everyone has their own preferences, so there’s no point in debating about food you have never tried before. I tried Kimyusu a few times before, and I think kiba is on par with that.”

“...You used to be from the city right?”

“Yes, but I’m not a resident of Genos.”

“I can tell that much from your pale face. Even you think that kiba is delicious?”

“Of course its delicious. If not, I won’t be opening a stall here. I tried all sorts of meat back in my hometown. I think the taste of kiba is top notch.”

“...How is that possible. Were you eating Munto or Gizu meat?”

It was hard to get through to this uncle.

When I fell into deep thought, Leito suddenly interjected:

“Excuse me, Kamyua let me safekeep the kiba jerky he got yesterday. After trying it, the kiba meat is different from karon, and is tasty in a unique way.”

And of course, those were made from kiba that had been blood let. It was great that he likes them.

Milano frowned doubtfully.

He then shook his head and gave up on the debate.

“...Anyway, I’m running a business here. If you don’t stink up my pushcart, I can lease you as many as you like. The marketplace rental and pushcart lease will be two white copper plates.”

“That will be for ten days right? By the way, what are the dimensions of the pushcart?”

“Go look for yourself at the marketplace, there’s a few pushcart leased out by me there. My inn’s name is engraved on them.”

“Understand. I will come visit in a few days.”

I should leave for now.

“Please inform me when Kamyua returns.”

After I said that to Leito, I left the 《Kimyusu’s tail inn》 with my two companions.

“Asuta... you are awesome. You really are a man of the city...”

Vena Wu leaned close to me.

“I can’t get along with someone like that... I might lose my cool and punch him, just like Ludo...”

“Vena Wu, I’m hiring you to tend to the stall alright?”

“Yes... I’m willing to endure all sorts of humiliation for your sake, you know...?”

What humiliation?

Could I really work together with her for ten days? I already felt uneasy about the

future.

“Let’s go shopping...? Hmm? What’s the matter, Ludo Wu?”

“Nothing... That kid just now...”

“Ah, you mean Leito. He’s a strange kid.”

“I don’t mean that— I think he is very pitiful.”

“Pitiful? Why?”

Leito’s mentor was a suspicious character, so I could sympathize with his situation. But Ludo Wu didn’t know how Kamyua’s character was.

“It’s fine, nothing to do with me. We should hurry. It’s been a while since I came to the Post Station Town, I want to shop for weapons.”

We set off on our incredible journey again.

I felt strange seeing these two walking so naturally in the Post Station Town.

“We are going to change for copper plates. Asuta, didn’t you rob those blessings from us? Are you going to use them?”

“Who robbed you...? Well, I was planning to use those blessings. But the tusks and horns you gave me aren’t on this necklace.”

There were ten tusks and horns on my necklace.

When Ai Fa and I splitted up at the Wu clan, he passed this necklace to me.

I was planning to use the tusks and horns I earned to buy the ingredients I needed in town, but Ai Fa was unhappy when she heard that.

“...You want to shoulder the entire burden yourself?”

“I’m planning to do that! Just ten tusks and horns isn’t enough to pay the initial cost right? I don’t want you to bear the entire cost.”

“...I’m the house head.”

“I know... But... If I don’t bear any of the cost, it will feel like I’m dumping everything onto you.”

Ai Fa fell into deep thought.

Ai Fa then took out a necklace from his cape. After adjusting the number of tusks and horns to ten, she gave it to me.

“Take this. Give me your necklace.”

“Okay... What do you want to do?”

“If the business in the Post Station Town fails, we will lose all our copper plates. I will then use your necklace to buy aria and poitan.”

Ai Fa put away the necklace I handed to her carefully.

“If the business is a success, we will get more copper plates. I will give you your necklace back then.”

“I see... I’m fine with that. But you—”

“It feels really awful to see someone shoulder all the responsibility. You made me realize that last night.”

Ai Fa’s face looked really scary.

“You don’t have any complains now huh... Besides, you don’t want to trade in the blessings Grandma Jiba gifted you for copper plates right?”

“Ah, yes, you actually knew. I don’t remember telling you that.”

“I can tell from your expression. I don’t know why you think that way— but if it won’t trouble others, you don’t need to suppress how you feel.”

Ai Fa said to me. Her eyes had calmed down a little.

“...What are you thinking about...”

Something warm wrapped around my right arm.

“Do you feel lonely after separating with your beloved mistress...?”



While we were walking in the Post Station Town, Vena Wu clinged onto my right arm.

I wanted to pull my arm away, but as expected of a denizen of Forest's Edge, she wouldn't budge at all.

"Excuse me! I told you just now too, I hope you can act properly when you work—"

"I know that... But I'm not working today right...? We are in the Post Station Town to buy our own groceries..."

She was right. Donda Wu already told me that I didn't need to pay any wages to the Wu clan today.

"B-But, Ludo Wu is here too? Is that fine?"

After I whispered that to Vena Wu, she winked at me sexily like usual.

"It's fine, Ludo wants you to marry into our clan... Asuta, do you like my dance...?"

"Dance?"

"The dance during the banquet... I dance so hard for your sake..."

What was she talking about?

I don't remember such a prominent event during the banquet.

"After everyone finish all the meat, all the unwed women got together to perform a dance of blessing...? I always attract the attention of all the men, so I would usually abstain from such an activity. But I did so for you..."

After all the meat was eaten...

I was probably talking with Ai Fa and Kaslan Lutim during that time.

I received the necklace as remuneration, spoke to them a little then fell asleep. Ai Fa then carried me into the empty room.

After I fell asleep— the unwed women then performed the dance of blessing.

“Did you... not see my dance...?”

“Eh, that’s not it. I was really busy that day, and fell asleep right after I finished my work.”

Vena Wu was stunned. After she closed her eyes, she gripped my arm tightly.

Her monstrous strength was on par with a madarama snake.

But I also felt an indescribable softness.

“Too much... Asuta, you are too much...”

“It hurts! It hurts so much! My arm is breaking! Vena Wu, wait!”

I felt intense pain, and I seemed to have touched some places I shouldn’t have.

We were walking along the streets and it was broad daylight, so this wasn’t the appropriate way to act.

“...You must never tell Leina about this...”

“It hurts...! Ehh? What is that about Leina Wu?”

“Her dance was like the blazing flame... Leina is a docile child, and I never knew she had such passionate emotions in her heart... You have stolen her heart completely...”

Vena Wu released my arm nimbly, then sighed.

“Asuta, I have already gotten over the fact that you are not willing to take me far away. I was thinking that it’s fine for you to marry into the house... This is bad... Leina will hate me...”

She glanced at me sideways sorrowfully.

“...Sinful man...”

I don’t remember committing any sins.

I knew that Leina Wu harboured special feelings towards me.

Leina Wu hoped that I could join the Wu clan, but I couldn't do that. How should I face her in the future, and how would our relationship be?

I looked up at the cloudless sky, but the answers weren't written there.

Part 4

Despite the complicated question without any answers lingering in my heart, I still needed to finish my work.

I need to find that old person with a toad-like smile, and exchange for copper plates at his shop.

“Asuta, you only changed a little.”

“Yes, we just bought aria and poitan recently, so this much would be enough.”

I had six copper plates in my hand.

I picked one larger tusk and horn, and got the funds I needed for today.

“You changed so many, as expected of a family of twelve.”

The duo from the Wu clan traded in five kiba worth of tusks and horns.

We had the same number of copper plates, but theirs were white, worth ten times that of the red copper plates.

“Fufu... This is just enough for three days worth of food...”

“Ehh? Then you need to visit the Post Station Town once every three days?”

I was right.

If they had manpower to spare, they would send three person to purchase five days worth of food.

The Fa house only had two people, so we could buy enough for twenty days. They had six times our numbers, so five days is the limit.

I calculated, the Wu clan will need 108 aria and 72 poitan.

The Fa house consume 120 aria and 80 poitan in twenty days, which was comparable

to the Wu clan's purchase.

"We still need to buy fruit wine for dad. I don't understand what he likes them."

"We have five red copper plates left... What vegetables should we buy...?"

It felt refreshing to discuss what things to shop for with the denizens of Forest's Edge inside the Post Station Town. It was the same feeling I had when I visit this place with Ai Fa.

The eldest sister and youngest brother were about the same height, and the way they were chatting looked so warming. When the people from the Post Station Town looked at them with fear and disdain, there was a sense of dissonance with this scene.

If no one provokes Ludo Wu, he won't give off a dangerous aura like the other men from Forest's Edge. On a closer inspection, his face is likeable, and not scary at all.

Ludo Wu's actions made me nervous at first, but I realized that I didn't need to worry after all.

Ai Fa was Ai Fa, Ludo Wu was Ludo Wu. I knew they were full of charm. No matter what others think, this fact would never change.

I decided to not be bothered by other people's gaze.

"Let's shop for vegetables. There's someone who runs a stall at the northernmost end..."

"Ah! Wait! I want to go to the weapon shop! Maybe there will be something interesting there!"

Ludo Wu parted the crowd and charged towards a stall.

More accurately speaking, he didn't part the crowd, the crowd parted themselves.

"...Sorry. He is already fifteen, but still acts like a child... Never mind, I'm twenty and still unwed, so I don't have the right to say that..."

In a sense, of all the time I knew Vena Wu, she look the most charming when she said

that with a smile.

If she was so happy being with her family, then she didn't need to yearn for the world outside— I thought to myself and walked to the stall. Ludo Wu pick up a machete and yell childishly.

"This is a machete? It looks like a murder weapon."

"...Hahaha, during war, the army will need to bash through the woods as they advance. If they encounter the enemy, the soldiers will engage right away with these machetes."

The uncle with ivory skin said with a slightly stiff expression.

Ludo Wu call this store a "weapon shop", but Genos was very far from their enemy nation Mahildra, so it was impossible for a battle to break out. This stall mainly sells blades for everyday use, such as machete, axes and knives.

"Ah, is this a cooking knife?"

I enquired from the side, and the uncle showed a confused face.

[Why is this pale brat wearing clothes from Forest's Edge?] His expression was saying this clearly:

"This is a knife for cutting vegetables."

The blade on this knife was thinner than my dad's Santoku knife, but was incredibly sharp.

I had seen this knife in the stove room of the Wu clan and house Lutim, and I felt overjoyed when I saw it for sale.

Dad already used his knife for twenty years. If it cracks, I won't be able to use it anymore. I can borrow Ai Fa's knife to cut the meat, but I still want to buy a knife for myself one day

"...This knife is priced at four white copper plates and five red copper plates."

The uncle said cautiously.

It's about four kiba's worth of tusks and horns

I will buy this knife when I have more money to spare.

"Thank you. Ludo Wu, it's about time for us to shop for vegetables."

"Hmm? Wait a minute."

Ludo Wu walked out of the stall.

With the thick machete still in his hand.

"H-Hey, wait!"

He ignored the uncle's shout, and stood on the road fiercely.

"Excuse me! Don't come near me for now!"

Ludo Wu shouted. The pedestrians wouldn't go near a man from Forest's Edge in the first place. They made a detour with sour faces.

"Asuta, Vena-nee, stay back too!"

Ludo Wu swung the machete after saying that.

He then pull the blade up with the sound of it cutting through the air.

As if his strike was burning the air itself.

The blade stall owner's face turned green.

So did the pedestrians.

Some stopped in their tracks, while others turned around and leave.

Ludo Wu didn't care about the troubled and fearful gazes on him, and continued swinging the machete quickly. Finally, he yelled: "I like it!"

“Looks like this machete can smash a kiba’s head in one hit! Uncle, how much is this?”

“E-Eight white copper plates.”

This machete was cost the tusks and horns of six large kiba, an extravagant price.

Considering the fact that eight white copper plates could buy sixty meals of aria and poitan, I realized once again how cheap these two ingredients were.

“Got it! Asuta, hold on to this, don’t let anyone buy it! I will be right back!”

Ludo Wu shoved the machete into my hands and ran off with haste.

The crowd splitted again, just like how Moses parted the sea in the ten commandments.
“...He is still a kid...”

Vena Wu smiled. I didn’t think a kid could wield this chunk of steel.

The machete was around 1cm thick, 10cm broad and 30cm long. It was sturdily built and the blade was curved slightly, weighing more than 1kg. This machete— could really smash the skull of a kiba.

...He was smaller than I am, how is he able to swing this machete?

The arm strength of a hunter was fearsome.

Ludo Wu charged back and bought the machete. After he secured it to his waist, we finally set off for the vegetable stall.

And of course, we visited Uncle Dora’s stall.

“W-Welcome!”

When he saw someone from Forest's Edge who wasn’t Ai Fa, his smile turned a little stiff. But he still welcome us cheerfully.

“So it’s this stall huh... I was right. There aren’t many stalls that sell sacks of aria and poitan after all...”

Vena Wu stood before the uncle, it seemed that this wasn't her first visit.

"One hundred aria and poitan please..."

"Alright, the aria is two white copper plates, and the poitan is two white and five red copper plates."

"Hmm? You are buying so many poitan?"

I whispered to Ludo Wu in surprise, and he replied: "Because Dad and Darum-nii eat a lot."

According to Ai Fa, the denizens of Forest's Edge would consume three aria and two poitan every day. That was "minimum number to stay healthy", but a lot of the men from the Wu clan would eat three or four people's share of poitan.

"Here, one hundred poitan and aria. Please check."

The uncle placed the heavy sacks on the ground, and the siblings started counting them harmoniously.

I also used this chance to complete my goal.

"Uncle Dora, can I ask you something?"

"Y-Yes, what is it?"

"Can tino be eaten raw?"

Tino was a lettuce-like vegetable that had the shape of a rose.

It was about the size of a lettuce, and had the taste and texture of a cabbage.

"Of course. But I prefer to cook them."

"I see, so do people usually cook the tarapa before eating them?"

Tarapa was a red fruit that had the size of a pumpkin.

It was very sour, and taste like tomato after it was brewed.

“Well, there are people who eat it raw, but it is too sour, so it needs to be cooked with other vegetables before eatng it. I like to make tarapa stew with aria.”

“Aria has a sweet taste after all. After dicing aria and frying it, you can bring out its sweetness by cooking it with tarapa.”

Dora opened his eyes wide in surprise.

“Y-You are very familiar with the vegetables.”

“Not at all, I don’t even know which vegetables can be eaten raw... By the way, can aria be eaten raw?”

“Of course.”

“Next is... Gigo. Does your stall sell gigo?”

“No, my farm isn’t suitable for gigo...Grandma Misill sells big and sweet gigo, they are popular around here.”

“Eh? Where is grandma Misill’s stall?”

“I-It’s in the central zone. Between the fine leather works and the cloth shop. A petite grandma runs a stall there by herself, you will know it when you see it.”

“I got it! Thank you!”

I was probably smiling unconsciously.

The uncle also showed a relaxed smile for the first time.

“Alright, the number is correct. Asuta, aren’t you buying?”

“That’s right. Uncle, I want two tino and three tarapa.”

“Ehh? You are buying so many tarapa?”

“Yes. I plan to use them to cook the food I will be selling... Oh right, after cooking the

tarapa, must it be finished on the same day? And if I cut a tarapa in half, how long can I keep the other half?"

"Hmm~ After cooking it, you can keep it for two days at the most. As for the tarapa that has been cut, it will lose its moisture if you leave it for too long. But if you add water when you cook it, the taste will be the same."

"I see. Thank you, you have been a big help."

As the tarapa and tino were large, just five of them filled up the entire bag.

By the way, the price for one tarapa and two tino were both one red copper plate.

I was left with two red copper plate.

Only the gigo and fruit wine were left.

"Hmm~ ... What should we buy... How about another tino...?"

"The tino is too big! But something smaller."

"...Pula then...?"

"Pula is unnecessary!"

"What should we buy then...? I like tino..."

"Buy chachi, chachi! Vegetable stew taste great if you add chachi in!"

"But chachi needs to be cooked for a long time before it turns soft...?"

Chachi was a vegetable that had the texture of potatoes.

The Wu clan used to cook kiba soup with strong flame in a short time. Cooking it this way would turn the outside of the chachi mushy while the inside remained crispy, and wouldn't bring out its sweetness.

"Don't worry. You boil the soul with a small fire right? The texture will be the same as the stew we had last time this way. Don't wait for the water to boil before adding the

chachi, please toss them in before you even start to boil the water.”

After I interjected, Ludo Wu shook Vena Wu’s shoulders triumphantly.

“See, even Asuta says so! Buy chachi!”

“Alright. If chachi can be cooked deliciously, I won’t have any complains... Hmm, so don’t wait for the water to boil before putting them in, we have to put them in before starting the fire...?”

“Yes.”

“Hee hee!”

Ludo Wu put his sister in a headlock.

“That hurts...”

Vena Wu squirmed her body sexily.

I didn’t know this pair of siblings were so close.

“...Huh? There’s no chachi here? You don’t sell them?”

“G-Grandma Misill does.”

The uncle replied timidly, then alternate his gaze between Ludo Wu and Vena Wu.

“Y-You two are really special. This is the first time I have seen the denizens of Forest's Edge pick out vegetables based on their own preference.”

“Huh? I hate pula! Sell chachi, don’t sell pula!”

“T-those are grown on trees, so it’s hard to grow them from the start.”

“Hmm, there are many types of vegetables huh.”

Ludo Wu and Vena Wu acted as they usually did, but the expression on the uncle’s face changed drastically.

He was stunned.

And then confused.

After that— he was all smiles?

Even though he feared the denizens of Forest's Edge, he was observing Ludo Wu carefully now.

When he heard the denizens of Forest's Edge discuss their preference for vegetables, he was so happy.

“Food has no distinction on being delicious or not”, these words filled me with regrets.

He must have felt the same as I did all this while.

While I was in deep thought, the voice of a girl rang out from my back.

“Ah! Asuta-nii!”

Tara was standing behind me.

She had a Kimyusu meat bun clasped tightly in her hand as she ran towards us with short strides.

However, she stood stiffly in place when she saw Ludo Wu and Vena Wu.

“Hmm? Who is this brat?”

“She is Tara, the stall owner’s daughter. I told you about her before right?”

“Ah, the brat you saved, who helped you later right?”

Ludo Wu took nimble steps towards the girl standing stiffly in place.

It felt like seeing a German shepherd approaching a kitten, which made me nervous. The poor uncle who had a surprised face was now turning green.

“Brat! You are about bratty Rimee’s size. How old are you?”

“Eight... Eight years old...”

“That’s the same as Rimee. But you are much thinner, so you look younger.”

Ludo Wu squatted down, and looked between the girl and the bun.

“Smell nice. Is it good?”

“...Yes.”

“I guess so.”

“You... You want to try?”

Tara offered the meat bun she was holding carefully in her hands to Ludo Wu timidly.

Ludo Wu tilted his head quizzically.

“Can I eat that?”

“J-Just a bite!”

“I see, then I will do that.”

After saying that, Ludo Wu bit down on the meat bun in Tara’s hand.

He bit really hard, as if he was trying to take off Tara’s fingers too.

The uncle screamed.

Ludo Wu didn’t chew too much before swallowing. He then scratched his yellowish brown hair and stood up.

“Well, it taste bad.”

“T-Taste bad?”

“Not good at all. Asuta’s cooking taste much better.”

“R-Really?”

Tara looked at me with a expression that seemed to be a mixture of smiling and crying.

I sighed, then walked towards them.

“Everyone has their own preferences. I don’t know if my cooking will be the city people’s liking, but I will be setting up a stall around here.”

“I see! Please let Tara try your cooking when you do.”

“As I will be running a business here, I will need to charge for the food... But I will let you and uncle have a try, please tell me your thoughts then.”

“Yes!”

What an adorable child.

Fortunately, Ai Fa wasn’t here, so no one would give me strange looks when I talk to other girls.

As I turned my head with that thought in mind, I found Vena Wu standing before the stall and watching me and Ludo Wu closely.

I really don’t get women.

“Well then, we only need to get fruit wine and chachi. What about you?”

“Hmm, I need fruit wine and gigo.”

“Ah, gigo! Vena-nee, let’s buy gigo too! Grilled poitan will only turn fluffy if you add gigo right?”

“Don’t worry... Even if we buy ten fruit wines, we will still have five copper plates left...”

Before Vena Wu could even finish, the last character made his appearance.

“Hi Asuta, I’m really glad that I get to meet you three days in a row. Have you finally

made up your mind?”

Kamyua Yost appeared before us.

He walked out of the crowd without a word and came towards us with his cloak flicking in the wind.

“Leito told me about your visit, so I went off to find you. You are at Uncle Dora’s place as expected.”

“Yes, I’m already done with my chores. It’s good to see you, Kamyua.”

I stole a glance at Ludo Wu.

Ludo Wu was expressionless.

However— his fingers were tapping on the sheath of the machete on his waist rhythmically.

Vena Wu walked briskly over, and stopped diagonally behind her brother.

“Oh right, they are—”

“Vena Wu and Ludo Wu of the Wu clan. Leito already told me. I would hate to have missed you, so I asked Leito to stay put at the inn.”

His expression was as elusive as ever.

His purple pupils that resembled both an elderly and a child were filled with glee, as he switched his gaze between them.

“Ludo Wu, I saw you at the Wu village before. Allow me to introduce myself again. I’m Kamyua Yost, my job is a 《guardian》 that ensures the safety of travelers. I’m a citizen of the western nation that roams freely and calls all the Post Station Towns I visit my home.”

“Hmmp~”

Ludo Wu answered half heartedly.

He continued tapping on his machete.

“Milano Mast already told me what happened. He agreed to rent you his pushcart.”

“Yes. I will prepare the stall after I’m done with the menu.”

“You finally made up your mind, I’m so happy! I’m willing to visit everyday if I can eat your cooking everyday.”

“I will prepare alluring food to attract your patronage everyday.”

That was all I need from Kamyua Yost today, to report this matter.

After Ludo Wu realized this fact, he spoke nonchalantly:

“Kamyua Yost. My father, the head of the Wu clan Donda Wu has a message for you. Will you listen to it?”

“Of course! Do tell me.”

“...Forest's Edge will clean up after our own shame. If you interfere, I will lop off your head— That’s all.”

“Understood, I will keep that in mind.”

Kamyua bowed in an exaggerated manner.

Ludo Wu kept a straight face, then glanced my way.

“Asuta, let’s go buy chachi and gigo. The sun will set if we take our time.”

“That’s true... Sorry about that, Kamyua. Thank you for making the trip here to see us, but we still need to do some shopping...”

“It’s fine it’s fine! After you open your stall, we can meet for ten days in a row. Asuta, I wish you the best of luck in your business.”

“Thank you.”

After he appeared quietly, Kamyua went off silently.

Somehow— I felt that Kamyua didn't have much of a presence today, and was like a ghost.

"...That man pissed me off."

Ludo Wu said all of a sudden.

"Huh?"

"My blade is meant to cut kiba, I don't intent to use it against people— however, I still feel pissed off when I'm facing an opponent I can't defeat. On top of that, he's from the city."

"L-Ludo Wu? What do you mean—?"

"Darum-nii and I isn't a match for him. Jiza-nii probably can't beat him either. Only Dad can cut off his thin neck."

Ludo Wu clicked his tongue as he ruffled his yellowish brown hair.

Part 5

An hour later, I finally reached the Fa house.

I had been away for more than 24 hours.

The two close siblings accompanied me. In order to prepare for her job in the Post Station Town, Vena Wu need to remember where my place was. More importantly, they were afraid that the Tsun clan might do something nefarious.

“Hmmp, looks like we won’t run into retards who gets drunk in broad daylight.”

Ludo Wu had the largest baggage out of the three of us. He checked the surroundings with keen eyes.

“...By the way, you need to cross such a deep valley from the Fa house to the Post Station Town. no wonder you need helpers.”

“Yes. If I head to the Post Station Town from the Wu village, I will have an easier time.”

The Forest's Edge settlement had several routes leading into the Post Station Town. The shortest path was from the Wu clan, and would take just 40 to 50 minutes., with no bridges and a comfortable road.

However, it would take an hour to travel from the Fa house to the Wu clan, a distance that makes me hesitate. On the other hand, carrying the goods and crossing the suspension bridge was much easier.

On the way home, we used the sacks of vegetables in the place of an iron pot, and did a trial run. If I could muster my courage, the two of us could really cross the suspension bridge with the iron pot.

This was our first try, and I spent quite a long time to gather my courage and resolve—if Vena Wu lose her infatuation with me because of that, I would have an easier time. But I’m afraid that I would lose her respect as a boss.

It was hard to tell if this was a blessing, but even after Vena Wu saw how terrified and unsightly I was, she continued to flirt with me.

“We are leaving now... I’m looking forward to the day when work starts...”

“Send Ai Fa our regards... Asuta, let us try your cooking once in a while, don’t just cook for the people in the city.”

After the two close siblings said that, they left.

Even though Ludo Wu was carrying 70 percent of the load, Vena Wu still had a hundred aria on her back. Her strides were nimble and quick, and didn’t miss a beat. As expected of a woman from Forest's Edge.

Ai Fa was right, I shouldn’t look down on the abilities of the women of Forest's Edge. Their muscular and skeletal structure must be very different from mine. Any women as tall as Vena Wu would definitely be stronger than me.

With the difference in the environment we were raised in, this couldn’t be helped—but I still couldn’t hold back my sigh.

If I eat kiba everyday, will my body change too?

I headed into the Fa house while lost in thought.

The sun was midway between its peak and the horizon.

It seemed that I had plenty of time to grill poitan.

Ai Fa was still hunting kiba in the forest. I had to prepare a sumptuous dinner for her. After sorting out my mood, I renewed my grip on the sack of tarapa and tino, as well as giant burdock gigo the stall helped me cut into a metre, then opened the door.

And— I saw Ai Fa’s cape on the wall.

“Hmm?”

It was still early, but she was already back.

She probably caught a kiba already, so I didn’t need to be alarmed. But where was she?

“Ai Fa, are you there?”

I called out as I walked into the food store.

I opened the door— and Ai Fa wasn’t there.

Setting aside the bounty I got today, I checked the other two storage room.

Ai Fa wasn’t there.

“Hmm?”

The new pot was already placed beside the stove.

There wasn’t anything that stood out besides that.

No—

On a closer look, I realized the sabre wasn’t there, even though the cape was there.

Unless she was sleeping, Ai Fa would always carry a knife with her. After she comes home, she would take off her cape and sabre, and lean it against the wall.

What was going on here?

She didn’t put on her cape, and only had her knife with her. Beside washing her clothes at the water source, I had never seen Ai Fa left the house without her cape.

Did she went to the water source?

No, the pots and water flasks were still in the room. We didn’t need to go to the water source unless it was early in the morning.

With a thumping heart, I charged out of the house.

Was she sunning the pico leaves?

No, I don’t smell the fragrance of pico leaves.

Instead, a stench entered my nostril.

It was mixed with rust— this was the stench of blood.

A chill immediately ran down my back.

...Where did this smell come from?

Where was the source?

Behind the house.

I hit my knee caps that was starting to tremble, and went to the back of the house.

It will be fine— I started deluding. Even if those people from the Tsun clan were lawless, it was impossible for them to commit such retarded acts in broad daylight.

Retarded acts—

No, I didn't dare to imagine it.

When I realized it, my heart was beating hard, and I was out of breath.

It was fine.

Ai Fa would be fine.

It was impossible for tragedies to happen.

I kept telling myself that as I walked along the walls—

I braced myself and stepped to the backyard.

And.

— I saw a kiba that was hung up, completely skinned.

.....

“Asuta, you’re home.”

Ai Fa was looking at the hanging kiba as she sat on the ground with her back against the wall.

I took big strides towards Ai Fa, bend forward, then grabbed her bare shoulders tightly.

“Don’t— Don’t scare me!”

Ai Fa widened her eyes confusedly.

“...Asuta, are you crying?”

“Who’s crying!”

I headbutted Ai Fa.

“That hurts.”

I heard her complaining, but I still press against Ai Fa with my head.

“Asuta, what’s wrong? Why are you so flustered?”

“Shut up! You made me so worried... Why are you skinning the kiba!? I was so terrified when I smelled the blood!”

“...Skinning is part of the hunter’s job right?”

Ai Fa replied displeasedly.

As we were too close, I couldn’t see her expression.

“The men from the Wu clan and house Lutim all take cares of the skinning work, but I haven’t learned it yet. That vexes me. I’m practicing with a kiba that I hunted. I have watched you skin the kiba several times after all.”

“If that is so... then tell me... I thought my heart was going to burst...”

“Just why were you so panicky?”

“...You don’t have your sabre with you, and I smell blood from outside the house. I thought something happened, and my mind was filled with ominous imagination.”

With my forehead sticking closely to Ai Fa’s forehead, I gave a deep sigh.

“I have my knife right here. Don’t worry, I know that ruffians might appear at any time, so I will always watch my surroundings.”

Ai Fa’s spoke in an irate tone.

“Were you imagining the Tsun clan men killing me? I won’t lose to those despicable people.”

“I know...”

“...You understand my feelings now?”

I was surprised, and lifted my head.

Ai Fa averted her eyes and pouted.

“Ever since I took a frail man like you into the Fa house, do you know how worried I was? If you know, then don’t act rashly in the future.”

“...Yes.”

“Getting worried over nothing is fine, but you even lectured me. I took care of such a tedious task, you should be thankful.”

“No, that... it’s my bad.”

“What I want isn’t your apology.”

“...Thank you?”

“Hmmp.”

Ai Fa stood up.

She crossed her arms arrogantly with a smug grin.

Could it be— she thought my eyes would sparkle after I see her skin the kiba, and tell her with wild joy and excitement: "How did you learn that? That's amazing!". When I see Ai Fa made that childish face, I couldn't help deluding.

I sighed again, steeled myself and stood up.

I patted Ai Fa's blonde hair and said: "good girl good girl", and was greeted with a sharp strike into my solar plexus.

"I don't know what are the next steps. What do I do after cutting open the stomach?"

While I was still struggling to breath, Ai Fa's voice came from above me.

A few seconds after I fell into an oxygen deprived state, I got up again.

"That hurts.... You are asking because you want to carry out the entire butchering process?"

"The men from the Wu house had all learned the steps after this."

She scowled her nose and showed a scary face. It had been a while since she showed her cat-like expression.

"I got it, I will teach you... If you butcher the kiba in the future, that will lighten my load. But won't the burden on you increase?"

"Don't be ridiculous. What will happen if you go to the Post Station Town? Will you have time to take care of the kiba and poitan after coming home? I don't want to drink the easy to prepare poitan soup any more."

I fell into deep thought again.

I was planning to get up earlier to grill the poitan for dinner and the merchandize. But it would take me at least three to four hours to dismember one kiba. No matter how much time i have, it would delay dinner time.

Ai Fa always notice the finer details than me.

No, when Ai Fa acts, she really think of “running the stall” as a job that involve both of us.

I still hold the attitude that [I shouldn't over rely on Ai Fa] deep in my heart. My values told me that this was correct— But I was in Forest's Edge now, not my world in the past.

I shouldn't think about things through my own value.

I shouldn't rely on her for everything, but I should do so at the right time.

What I should be doing was to go through thick and thin with Ai Fa.

“I understand. What you said make sense. Since you will be responsible for skinning and butchering the kiba, I will work hard on the other tasks.”

“Hmmp.”

“My house head is really dependable... In order to not get left behind, I will have to give my best.”

“Don't joke with me. I'm just doing my work as a hunter.”

Ai Fa still looked a little unhappy as she pulled out her knife.

“No one can replace your work. You have to work hard in cooking delicious food.”

“I know, but—”

Not just me, Ai Fa's work was irreplaceable too.

Ai Fa had to take care of the chores of the Forest's Edge women early in the morning, then enter the forest to hunt in the noon. In all of Forest's Edge, only Ai Fa was capable of doing that.

Part 6

“...I did some calculations.”

After dinner, I told Ai Fa the plan I had organized in my mind.

“The ingredients I will be using are aria, poitan, tino, tarapa, and poitan mixed with gigo. Considering the issue of making profits, we can use the cost effective aria and poitan, but the people in town won’t want to buy that. So I decided to focus on how the people in town feels.”

“Yes.”

“Kamyua told us that we will be selling light meals to be eaten in the day, not dinner. I don’t need to be worried about the nutrition intake. And so, I will use aria to add to the fragrance, and use just one poitan for each portion. I will also throw in tarapa and tino. It should be as nutritious as the meat bun I tried last time.”

“Yes.”

“I did a rough estimate, one portion is about 0.65 red copper plates. As half a day worth of aria and poitan is about 0.55 red copper plates, it’s not too big a difference. Hence, I want to use other ingredients to garnish its taste and appearance.”

“...Ugh.”

“0.65 red copper plates is the ingredient fee for making ten portions a day, but making ten portion will leave a lot of tarapa over. If I make twenty portions, I will just need 1.5 times the tarapa. As tarapa is the most expensive ingredient, I can push the cost down to below 0.6 red copper plates if I make twenty portions a day. If we make 30 or 40 portions, the ingredient cost will gradually fall too.”

“.....Yes.”

“Next would be the other expenses. The venue and pushcart rental for ten days is two white copper plate, or twenty red copper plates. There’s also the wage I need to pay Vena Wu. We can’t dismiss this wage too. We are paying her a tusk and a horn for one day of work. That will be six red copper plates, and sixty red copper plates in ten days. The initial cost and her wages will be eighty red copper plates. Hence, we need to sell

at least 40 portions, or we won't make any profit."

"Yes."

"After setting the ingredient cost to the highest estimate of 0.65, we will need to sell sixty portions in this ten days to break even. That's six portions a day. Most people in the Post Station Town have yet to experience the tastiness of kiba. Furthermore, the people in the city finds kiba meat repulsive, so the sales for the first few days might be terrible, we just have to wait to build our customer base through word of mouth slowly."

"...Asuta."

"Even if we sell just one or two portions in the beginning, we can make money if we can sell 20 portions in the last three days. I think the situation is favourable to us. According to my research, the a stall in the Post Station Town can sell between 20 to 50 portions a day. I hope we can achieve the minimum target at the very least."

"Asuta, Asuta."

"Even if the situation is in our favour, there is still risks. We can't just compete on taste alone, the important thing is to improve the prejudice the people in town has towards kiba and the denizens of Forest's Edge. If that didn't work, we might not even sell a single meal. So we shouldn't overestimate ourselves, and just prepare ten portions for the first few days, and keep the ingredient cost as low as possible—"

"Asuta!"

"Yes? What is it?"

When I realized it, Ai Fa was leaning against the wall, tilting her head and glaring at me.

What's with her? She wasn't sitting cross legged, and she look really cute with her slanted sitting position.

"...Are you torturing me intentionally?"

"Hmm? What do you mean?"

I tilted my head in quizzingly.

As the room was dim, I couldn't see very well, but I noticed Ai Fa's eyes were teary.

"I don't understand what you are talking about! My head is hurting!"

"W-Was my explanation too hard to understand? Sorry, I will make it simpler..."

"No need! I will leave it all to you! My head hurts!"

The way she throws her temper reminds me of Lala Wu.

Even though Ai Fa was very emotional, she seldom lose control.

"D-Didn't you ask me to explain to you properly? This is our work, so you should know the details..."

"I said no need meow! My head hurts!"

Meow!?

Did she just say meow!?

J-J-Just what happened to her? Did Dan Lutim's toddler regression virus got her?

As I was panicking, Ai Fa rest her forehead on the wall, and collapsed onto the floor.

"...My head hurts..."

"Uwah, are you alright!? Hey, Ai Fa!"

When I saw Ai Fa collapsed onto the floor weakly, I picked her up.

When I put my hand on her forehead, it felt rather warm.

"D-Did you overexert your brain? Hey, does it hurt? I will get you some water."

"No need... You are too loud..."

Ai Fa frowned painfully, and closed her eyes.

“Don’t move... My head hurts...”

“I-I understand.”

I rest Ai Fa on my lap, and wait for her to recover slowly.

Under such circumstances, I obviously couldn’t have impure thoughts. But it was the first time we were so close together, and Ai Fa’s body warmth made it hard for me to stay calm.

“...Are you alright?”

“...Just a while more.”

She grabbed my t-shirt tightly.

Her breast’s covered in the garments of Forest's Edge started heaving hard.

She seemed to be in a lot of pain.

“I’m sorry being so detailed... You don’t need to worry about the accounting. After all, I don’t know how to hunt kiba too, so just leave these matters to me.”

Ai Fa didn’t answer, and kept grinding her head on my chest.

Her head was probably still throbbing.

“If the business fails, I will try my best to minimize our losses. I won’t waste the kiba that you hunt at the risk of your life.”

“...If the business fails, how many tusks and horns will we lose?”

Ai Fa asked, she had calmed down a lot.

I was relieved, and answered:

“If we can’t even sell one meal in the next ten days, we will lose twelve kiba’s worth of tusks and horns. It’s hard to imagine right?”

“It’s hard to imagine.”

“That’s right. The venue and pushcart rental cost less than two kiba. Half of the balance is the ingredient cost, the half is the wages for Vena Wu. If it comes to that, we can only cut the ingredient cost.”

“...Yes.”

“When I was in the Post Station Town, I didn’t see any stalls that only sell cooked meat alone. Some stalls will roast the thighs of birds and some vegetables, which seemed to be drinking snacks for the people in town. I have to compete with the other stalls with my light meal... If I just want to earn a quick buck, I just need to sell grilled meat or jerky.”

“There’s no point in doing that. We already have enough copper plates to survive.”

Ai Fa pulled her necklace with her other hand, which made jingling sounds.

The tusks and horns on her neck and in her cape far exceeds twelve kiba. The Fa house only has two members, if she could hunt a kiba every two days, we didn’t need to worry about copper plates.

This was proof that the number of kiba was increasing, and that Ai Fa was in even more danger. Ai Fa wished to use the tusks and horns she earned by risking her life, and challenged the citizens of the Post Station Town的人民.

Our goal was to make Forest's Edge even more prosperous— The Fa house suffered in the past because of poverty. For the sake of the other tribe members suffering in silence in Forest's Edge, we had to give it a shot.

“I can’t talk about a grandiose dream like Kaslan Lutim... However, I won’t regret it even if we lose many of our tusks and horns. Asuta, you just need to try your best. Just like that time when you faced off against Donda Wu, and when you agreed to tend to the hearth for the wedding.”

“Yes, with the reputation of the Fa house on the line, I will aim to be the very best that no one ever was... Does your head still hurts? If you feel better, why don’t you sleep earlier today?”

“...Yeah.”

Ai Fa nodded in agreement, but she still didn't move.

“Ehh... Should I put you down on the floor?”

“If you think I'm heavy, you can put me down.”

How could that be? Her weight only made me feel comfortable.

If she didn't want to, I didn't want her leave my arms.

“...When will you open the stall?”

“Four days later. Three days later, the Wu clan will head into the Post Station Town to buy groceries. I will work on the merchandize and improve it for this few days... By the way, your only comment is [delicious], anything else that needs to be improved?”

“No.”

“I see... That dish and normal hamburg steak, which taste better?”

“...They are both good.”

“If you have to choose one?”

“...Are you trying to make my headache worst?”

Ai Fa grumbled then turned on my knees.

She didn't turn away from me, but towards me.

“If the people in the city thinks that dish taste bad, their tongues must be rotten. You should stop running your stall and just cook for me then”

“I will be happy to live like that too... But I will do my best to achieve success.”

“Yes.”

Ai Fa nodded.

“Asuta, when you are happy, I feel happy.”

“That’s right.”

“Seeing you succeed— makes me proud.”

Ai Fa mumbled. As she was lying on my chest, it looked like she was whispering to my heart.

...It will be fine.

There would be mountains of problems waiting for me after I set up my stall.

After all, we went into this battle so lightly.

For the past eight decades, the citizens of Post Station Town discriminated against the denizens of Forest’s Edge and kiba, how far could I overturn this preconception of theirs?

I will do everything within my powers.

For the sake of the people I cherished and their hometown, I will do all that I could.

I hope that I could raise my head high and tell the entire world that I was a part of Forest’s Edge.

When I realized it, Ai Fa had already fallen asleep in my arms.

...As long as you are by my side, everything will be just fine.

I muttered in my heart as I feel the calming weight and warmth on my body.

Chapter 4

The Kiba Food Stall in the Post Station Town

Part 1

I was prepared for my war.

The pot was filled with ingredients, with a piece of cloth covering it like a lid. The underside of the cloth had fake rubber tree leaves sewn into it for waterproofing, and we even used fuibaha vines to secure the entire pot.

I used a clean piece of cloth to wrap up the grilled poitan and put the tino and aria into the sack for vegetables.

I put the wooden spatula for stirring, a small spatula for scooping the ingredients, a chopping board made of krilee wood, two plates and the santoku knife into the same bag.

The other bag was full of firewood, a small machete and rana grass to start fires.

I already put the red copper plates used as change, and the white copper plates for Milano Mast into the pouch on my waist.

Everything was set.

I cleared the cutleries for dinner early in the morning, forage for herbs and firewood, and cleared all the morning chores. The time was between dawn and noon.

All there was left was to wait for Vena Wu to reach the Fa house.

“This day has finally come.”

Ai Fa said.

“Yes, it’s finally time.”

I replied.

“We have to make it through these ten days first.”

“Yes, I will do my best.”

“We will have to live like this for ten consecutive days.”

“If this kind of life ends after ten days, that means our effort has been wasted.”

“You will be together with the eldest daughter of the Wu clan for half a day in these ten days.”

“Huh?”

“Anyway, work hard.”

“Yes, I will work hard!”

“She’s your betrothed after all.”

“Not at all! There’s no such thing!”

I turned and look at Ai Fa in shock.

“W-Why are you bringing this up now? Your expression didn’t change at all when Donda Wu named Vena Wu as my helper right?”

Ai Fa put her hand on my shoulder nonchalantly.

“Don’t panic, I’m just kidding.”

“Ughhh...”

“Do your job properly, I will do my part too.”

Ai Fa’s expression remained calm and collected, and there was a gentle light in her eyes.

“...I will await your safe return.”



Vena Wu arrived on time. We used a krilee stick to carry the iron pot and cross the terrifying cliff, and reached the Post Station Town.

The first destination was the 《Kimyusu’s tail inn》 .

Milano led us to the back of the inn, and we met with the pushcart that will be battling alongside us for the next ten days.

That was a mobile pushcart.

About 2m tall, 1.5m wide and 80cm deep, the structure was made from wood, and a leather sheet covered the roof of the stall. The front and sides were covered with wooden boards, and reach up to my waist. Only the wall on the inside had a door that could be opened.

I opened the door and find it empty, and the interior walls were covered in clay.

A charcoal brazier shaped depression was right in the center.

I needed to start a fire in the brazier and heat up the pot.

I placed the pot on the wooden board that had a hole in the center, and it fit in snugly.

There were air holes to the right side of the board to expel the smoke.

The structure of this pushcart was simple.

Since it was simple, using it would be a hitch.

“...Please take care not to damage the pushcart.”

I gave a friendly nod to Milano Mast who was showing a sour face the first thing in the morning.

Vena Wu turned her head away nonchalantly.

“Okay then, follow me.”

With Milano Mast leading us, we walked on the streets.

This was the first time I visited the Post Station Town before noon, there was about 30% lesser people on the streets.

As Vena Wu and I pushed the pushcart forward, countless gazes watched us. Their eyes were filled with confusion and shock, as if they didn't understand why the denizens from Forest's Edge were pushing the cart.

Yellow skinned people.

The ivory skinned crowd.

Black skinned men.

White skin citizens.

People of all races and creed were staring us.

A foreigner in Forest's Edge clothing and a denizen of Forest's Edge who was like the incarnation of sexiness. Vena Wu and I were the most prominent duo. As we were pushing a cart painstakingly, they couldn't just ignore us.

“How annoying... We are more prominent than usual...”

“It's fine, this will serve as our advertisement.”

In that case, news of the [denizens of Forest's Edge are setting up a stall] would spread through the city. It was fine for them to think of us as a joke, I didn't mind them being curious or fearful. I just hope that more people would know about us.

We passed through the lodging zone, and when we reached the marketplace, most of the stalls had already up and running.

The gazes of the stall owners were also focused on us.

In the entire Post Station Town, only the Totos Moa were unmoved by us.

“Hi, so you are really opening a stall here.”

Uncle Dora who sells vegetables greeted us along the way.

“That’s right. I will be in your care for this ten days.”

As Milano Mast didn’t stop, I had to greet him while pushing the cart.

Uncle Dora’s smile was much more natural. He sent us off with his gaze as we continued north.

Milano Mast brought us to the furthest fringe of the marketplace.

In order to set up the marketplace, the Post Station Town cleared a path through the woods. And our stall was in the northernmost end.

Our stall was on the right side, facing the north.

If another two or three stalls were added, they would be right at the edge of the woods. They would need to clear more of the forest then. No matter what, our stall was at the extreme corner of the marketplace.

The pedestrians here were sparse.

There wasn’t any stall opposite us.

Our neighbour was an old man with dubious accessories placed on a cloth on the ground. When he saw us, he looked dumbfounded like a child.

“I already told you these rules yesterday. Take note of these two main points: You can’t tout for customers loudly, and you can only start a fire in the brazier... Also, you must report to me if you see anyone break these rules.”

“I got it. Thank you for your help.”

“Hmmp... Next will be the signboard. Hey, what do you want to write on it?”

“Ehh? Signboard?”

There was a signboard on the cart, but it was blank. It only had a hieroglyphs or logo at the bottom right corner that says 《Kimyusu’s tail inn》 .

“You have to write down what you are selling on the signboard, or your customers will be clueless. What do you want to write?”

Milano Mast took down a small leather pouch tied to his waist and opened its strings.

Inside the pouch was a gooey green fluid, and a small stick. The fluid had a stinging smell, a bit like grass. I guess it was a dye made from vegetation.

“Well then, please... help me write [Kiba].”

“...I guess so.”

Milano Mast sighed and started writing a large symbol with his pen and dye.

The symbol was a combination of ovals and curves and had four curvy lines extending upwards. They bore some resemblance with the tusks and horns of a kiba.

“It looks great, it feels very kiba.”

“...You have to push the cart back to the inn every day. I want to check it for damages.”

“Alright. We are also planning to close the stall before dusk.”

Milano Mast grunted one last time before leaving.

The old man was still looking at us with a blank expression from the side.

“Let’s start with the preparation.”

I asked Vena Wu to help me undo the pot sealed with fuihaba vines.

When I took off the lid made from cloth and fake rubber tree leaves, Vena Wu cheered.

“No wonder I keep smelling the scent of tarapa... is that vegetable stew...?”

“No, we don’t have the time or the budget. This is just tarapa sauce.”

As I used two whole tarapa, the pot was sixty percent filled with bright red sauce.

Tarapa had the sourness of tomato. After I cooked it with diced aria and fruit wine, then season it with salt and pico leaves, the special tarapa sauce was done.

“I’m starting the fire. Vena Wu, can you help me open that sack?”

“Okay.”

After glancing at Vena Wu who nodded in acknowledgement, I started a fire in the brazier with rana grass.

The sauce was already cold, so I need to start a big fire.

Considering the size of the brazier and the distance from the brazier to the pot, the fire should be smaller than the one in the makeshift stove used during the wedding. In order to heat the entire pot evenly, I had to use strong fire.

I brought all the firewood we had over, and they would probably be used up before we close the stall. I would then have to forage for firewood then. That was why I brought a machete along.

I estimated the operation hours would be five hours.

We left the house between dawn and noon and planned to head home between noon and dusk. I also had to account for the two hours traveling time.

According to my biological clock, dawn was six, noon was twelve and dusk was seven. We would open the stall at 10am and close the stall at 3pm in the afternoon.

“Hmm... Now that I think about it, I find this incredible... I never imagined that I will be peddling merchandize in the Post Station Town, I never dream that this would happen...”

“I feel the same. But the time we spent in Forest's Edge are incomparable, so this

feeling must be much stronger for you.”

Maybe Donda Wu sent her to help because he knew that she yearns for the world outside.

No, if he knew how Vena Wu felt, he would forbid her from going out.

Anyway, Vena Wu was very cheerful today. Compared to the last time she came with me, she looked much happier.

“But will this really sell... There are so few people...”

“This is the edge of the Post Station Town after all.”

From this stall I could see the people enter the Post Station Town from the north, and those who are leaving the Post Station Town and heading north. There was barely anyone who came all the way here to buy goods.

“This is our first day, so we can take it easy. The goal for this two days is to let everyone know that we exist.”

The news of denizens from Forest's Edge selling kiba meals in the Post Station Town would definitely spread in the entire city. Over time, there would be curious people here to check us out. In the first few days of our stall opening, we had to grasp these customer source tightly.

The tarapa was starting to bubble, so I used the spatula Vena Wu handed me to stir the iron pot.

“Vena Wu, please help me stir the sauce later. There are many hamburg steaks in the sauce, take care not to break them.”

“Got it... smells nice... it is still daytime, but I’m starting to get hungry...”

“Ah, if you can still eat, please try one later.”

When she heard that, Vena Wu’s eyes started to shine.

“Can I...? Isn’t this merchandize...?”

“This is the merchandize we are selling, so we will have to try its taste first. I made some extra for taste testing.”

Vena Wu was squatting by the stall and taking things out from the sack. But she stood up and quietly walked to my side.

When an ominous feeling appeared in my heart, Vena Wu gripped the excess cloth on my waist tightly and said:

“I’m so happy... thank you, Asuta...”

“Y-You’re welcome. This is also part of the job.”

Vena Wu was very serious during the wedding banquet preparation too, so she wouldn’t take any inappropriate actions during work. In this regard, she really was a model denizen of Forest's Edge.

In that case— I could probably get along well with this colleague.

“Good, it’s heating up. Please help me stir.”

I placed the black krilee chopping board on the right of the work platform, then placed the tino, aria, plates and santoku knife on top.

The leaves of the tino overlaps in the shape of a rose and was a vegetable that resembles a lettuce in appearance.

It had the texture of a cabbage. I plucked a large leaf and chop it to shreds.

I then cut the aria which had the texture of onions into thin slices.

After cutting these two vegetables, I moved them onto the plate and mixed them together.

I then placed the grilled poitan that was wrapped in a cloth onto the working platform, and the preparation was done.

“Vena Wu, please remember how to make this, it’s not difficult at all.”

“Ara... What a small poitan...”

“Yes. I only used half a poitan for each of these grilled poitan.”

The Wu clan would usually grill two poitan at one time, its diameter was about 30cm.

The grilled poitan here only used a quarter of that amount and was about 14 to 15cm wide.

I added gigo, so the grilled poitan was fluffier, and the thickness was about 1.5cm. It looked as small and cute like a cream coloured muffin.

“We will first put a layer of tino and aria on the mini poitan. It should be slightly thinner than the poitan. We will then put a hamburg steak on top of it.”

After I scooped up the hamburg steak soaking inside the pot, Vena Wu gasped in surprise again.

Normally, the hamburg steak would be moulded into an oval, but this one was circular.

It was about 180g.

It was 12cm in diameter, and 3cm thick.

The hamburg steak was covered in red tarapa sauce. After adding shredded tino on top, I covered it with another poitan.

The product of this stall [Kiba burger] was complete.

“Isn’t it simple? Please try it.”

I took the stirring spatula from Vena Wu and handed her the [Kiba burger].

“...It looks...”

“Hmm?”

“I think, it looks tasty...”

“It’s delicious, I love hamburgers.”

“...It’s not dinner, so I don’t need to say grace right...?”

“I guess? I don’t know either.”

Vena Wu stood haplessly on the spot, as if she couldn’t bear to eat the hamburger in her hands.

She then finally made up her mind and opened her lustrous lips— and took a big bite out of the [Kiba burger].

“Be careful not to spill the fillings. It’s better to hold it sideways.”

She nodded, then took another big bite.

The women in Forest’s Edge uses both hands to hold the hamburger. The way they chew with satisfaction looked very adorable. I realized that when I let Ai Fa taste test it.

Ai Fa was always calm and collected, but she looked very pure and adorable when she eats a burger. It was the same for Vena Wu who was overflowing with sexy charm, they were both equally cute.

After Vena Wu finished her burger, she lowered her head slightly again, and grabbed my waist band tightly.

“...This is really delicious...”

“I-I see. That’s great!”

Instead of the flirty Vena Wu who squirms her body, her childish actions make her doubly charming

But there was nothing to gain from analysing that.

“What are your thoughts? Will it sell?”

“I don’t know... If the people in town thinks this burger is unpalatable, that means they are not worthy of eating Kiba...”

Her comments were the same as Ai Fa.

I think they were exaggerating too much.

The people in the city thinks that kiba meat was “tough and smelly”. To wipe away that ill impression, I wanted to use [Kiba burger] as my first weapon. This was a changeup pitch.

Since there wasn’t any food like hamburger in town, they would be intrigued by it. But if I want the people in the city to understand how tasty kiba meat actually was, I would need to rely on the strength of simple meat dishes like steaks and grills.

By the way, moulding hamburg steak was very time consuming, and I could carry twenty of them in one pot. If I used another container to transport pre-grilled hamburg steak, and make the balance sauce in the stall, I could stock up to 40 hamburgers. But that was just my first pitch in my attack of the Post Station Town.

My thinking was very simple, hamburger was the symbol of a light meal. In the Post Station Town, the Kimyusu meat bun and other light meals consist of meat, vegetables and carbohydrates, so I decided to follow this model.

Tarapa has a strong fragrance. As we couldn’t tout for customers loudly, the “fragrance” was exceptionally important. The tarapa sauce made from tarapa, fruit wine and the aria to enhance its flavour had an alluring aroma, which would definitely stimulate the appetite of any passers-by.

When the [Kiba burger] attracts enough customers to visit, I will upgrade my menu—and sell food that was less tedious to prepare, and slowly share the deliciousness of kiba meat with the residents of the Post Station Town.

These ten days would decide the progress of the next step.

If I could sell 20 to 30 portions before the final day, I will push out a new menu for the next ten days, which would be a great sales record.

Today was the opening day. To save on ingredient cost, I only prepared ten burgers. I would be satisfied if I sold all of them.

“Alright, we are starting our battle soon!”

The instant I announced that—

With a donk, something hit the roof.

And as if a hole had opened in the sky, rain poured down suddenly.

“Hya.”

Vena Wu yelped without any tension, then swiftly carried the sack with our goods under the roof.

This was a sudden downpour commonly seen in Forest's Edge.

As Forest's Edge was just an hour away, the weather was very similar.

However—

When the sudden rain stopped without any warning, even the sparse pedestrian before us were gone.

Part 2

"I see!"

That was all I could say.

The people in the city was used to sudden downpour like this, some of them dash across the streets, while others hid under the trees to minimize their losses.

The old man selling accessories beside us picked up the cloth with his wares in a flash, then escaped into the woods behind him. His reaction and nimble feat was amazing.

After the rain stop, everyone came out onto the streets haplessly— the northern side where we were located was deserted.

I looked to the left of the stall, and the southern streets had already reverted to its crowded state before the rain.

As very few people would come here to buy things, everyone had already moved on to other places, and the place turned desolated.

"...All the pedestrians are gone..."

"It can't be helped, this is natural disaster. The crucial timing is the period right after noon, so let's rest up for now."

Thanks to Vena Wu's quick reactions, the firewood didn't get wet. The rain was also kept out of the pot. We had not run into unsalvageable accidents yet, so we could only accept this fact graciously.

"...So, we will just stand here until the afternoon crowd shows up...?"

"Yes. Waiting is also part of our job."

"...I'm sorry that you are paying so much salary..."

"Don't mind that. Carrying the goods, stirring the sauce, replenishing firewood, I can't do all that alone. Our work is just beginning."

However, there was still two more hours before noon.

In these two hours, we could only watch the fire with a hollow feeling.

I could use this chance to gather firewood, but the rain just stopped, so that was useless. The dripping wet branches would dry in an hour or two, so we decided to settle this chore later.

Which meant we had nothing to do.

“Ehh... Let’s chat?”

“Alright...”

“Vena Wu, which one of your family are you closest too?”

“...Do you think that is an interesting topic...?”

“I think it’s rather interesting.”

Vena Wu sighed softly, then fiddled with her brown hair.

“I get along with Rimee and Ludo the best... I feel happy when I’m with Darum too...”

“Ah, Darum Wu?”

“Yes... Even though he is quiet and quick to anger... He looks really cute when he is mad.”

“W-Wait. You are older than Darum?”

“Yes. But we are just one year apart...”

I had the habit of grouping the men and the women in the Wu clan apart, so I never thought about their age as a whole before.

Of all the Wu clan siblings, only Vena Wu and Darum Wu’s position in the family was hard to differentiate.

Darum Wu was a year younger than Vena Wu, and was nineteen. I recorded this information in my mind.

“By the way, how old is Jiza Wu?”

“Jiza-nii is 23...”

“Oh! He’s younger than I thought! Rimee Wu is eight, right? Then... they are 15 years apart! That’s a lot!”

“Is that so...? Well, some girls have children when they are fifteen, so their age difference is comparable to a parent and child...”

Vena Wu looked at me adorably.

“I want to ask... Is this topic really interesting?”

Very.

The denizens of Forest's Edge spent most of their day busy with chores, they probably feel that idling around was something unbearable.

“...I want to hear your story...”

“Ehh? I don’t know anything interesting?”

“...I want to know about your country...”

I turned silent for a moment as I stared at the red tarapa.

“I’m sorry, I don’t want to talk about my hometown too much... My heart turns heavy whenever I do.”

“Ara, but why...?”

“...After I disappeared suddenly, I don’t know if my father is able to accept that fact and live on.”

After a short moment of silence, Vena Wu muttered: “Sorry...”

The air between us was unexpectedly heavy.

And then—

“Asuta onii-chan!”

With that energetic voice, my little saviour charge here through the puddles.

Tara appeared before us.

“Amazing! You are really opening a stall here!”

Tara put her hand on the pushcart and looked up at me.

She then turned timidly towards Vena Wu beside me and smile.

Vena Wu smiled back.

“The tarapa smells nice! Is that the kiba meal?”

“Yes. I don’t know if you will like it.”

“I want to try! I want to buy one!”

“This is a portion for an adult, it cost two red copper plates each.”

“I see. I will ask Dad for the copper plates!”

“Ah, wait, it will be bad if you don’t like it. Try some first...Vena Wu, there’s a sack with a plate inside, can you bring it here?”

While I was instructing Vena Wu, I searched for something inside the pot.

It was some mini hamburg steak I moulded for the sake of taste testing.

The mini hamburg steak was one size smaller than the normal merchandize. I split it in half within the pot, then scooped half a mini hamburg steak onto a plate.

I then split that hamburg steak into three parts and took out my secret weapon— I sliced off some krilee branch, dried it and made this— toothpicks. I pick up one hamburg steak with it.

“Here, please try it.”

Tara just stood there when I offered her the plate.

“...Do you need copper plates?”

“This is a way my countries sell food. We will ask the customers to try before they buy it. I have already gotten permission from the venue and stall rental. Don’t hold back, try one.”

“I see... Thank you! I will help myself then!”

Tara grabbed one toothpick bravely and send the small hamburg steak into her mouth.

“...how is it?”

My heart was pounding at this moment.

Almost all the denizens of Forest's Edge had nothing but praise for my cooking.

However, everyone understood the concept of cooking in Rock City and the Post Station Town, would my seasoning and culinary skills be of use— Leaving Kamyua Yost of dubious origins aside, this was the first time someone from the city will be commenting on my food.

Tara she—

Stood stiffly with the toothpick in her mouth.

She stared at me with her eyes opened in surprise.

“What is this...”

She finally squeezed out in a shocked voice.

Her small yellowish-brown face burst out in joy.

“Asuta-nii, this is delicious! Really delicious!”

I almost collapsed right there.

I was so scared that I almost had a heart attack.

But... I finally got through the first stage.

“It’s great! I want to eat more! I will get some copper plates from Papa!”

“Ah, wait! Tara, I want your father to try it too before I can accept your copper plates with ease... Eh, I don’t have many picks like this, can you reuse it?”

“Yes!”

Tara nodded vigorously and used the toothpick to take another piece of hamburger steak. She then took brisk steps as if she was relaying a holy flame and returned to her father.

Uncle Dora’s vegetable stall was a short distance away, and we could just manage to see the leather roof of his stall from here.

“...Asuta, that’s wonderful...”

“That’s right! That’s wonderful...! Ara, the light of hope seems brighter now! If the taste is acceptable, we just need to worry about attracting the customers to visit!”

“That’s the hardest part...”

“It’s fine, we are providing free samples to draw them in! When the crowd increases, I will provide samples mainly to the southerners and easterners!”

However, I only grilled two mini burgers for taste testing. Each piece could only be divided into six, so there were only twelve portions.

If the hamburger meant to be merchandized couldn’t sell, I plan to give them out as samples too. Our goal was to let more people know how delicious kiba was. I wouldn’t

mind even if we only gave out samples if our merchandize fail to sell

“Asuta... I don’t really want to talk to the people in the city proactively...”

“Hmm? Ah, I will receive them! Please help me watch the fire.”

“No, that’s part of my job... Please don’t be angry if I don’t do it well at the start okay...?”

As expected, the denizens of Forest's Edge take their work very seriously.

The streets remained deserted, but my emotions became more heightened.

While I was chatting with Vena Wu, Tara ran over briskly again.

“Papa says it tastes great! He is very surprised too, and can’t believe that is what a kiba taste like.”

Tara handed over some copper plates.

The dull red copper plates— there were four of them?

“I want two! One for Tara, one for Papa.”

To be frank, I almost cried right there.

I was handsomely paid for the wedding banquet, but seeing a customer complimenting my cooking in front of me— my tear glands would definitely be stimulated.

To keep my pride as a man, I couldn’t cry here. I replied: “You are welcome!” and started cutting tino and aria.

I placed the cut vegetables onto the grilled poitan, stacked a meat patty covered in tarapa sauce on top, and top it off with another grilled poitan.

“Here, thank you for waiting...! The fillings fall off easily, so hold it horizontally when you are eating it.”

“Yes! Thank you! It looks so yummy.”

I should be the one thanking her.

After passing the merchandize to Tara, I accept her copper plates.

Four red copper plates.

This was the first sale of our stall.

“...You have to sell one more burger to earn my wages, right? Is your business really sustainable...?”

“Of course! Although she is only here because we are acquainted, but the fact a Genos local is our first patrons fills me with hope.”

“I see... Ah, Asuta...”

She tugged on my waist band again.

I looked up, and someone dressed like a traveler was walking over from the north. He was looking at Tara who was jogging away and our stall in surprise.

He had a cloak, and a hood concealed his face. But I caught glimpses of his dark skin.

He was from the eastern kingdom Semu.

It was a good chance to do some promotions. I started offering the plate in my hands towards him.

But before I could even react, he walked quickly to our stall.

When he came near us, he pulled back his drenched hood.

He was a citizen of Semu, with black hair, eyes and skin.

He was a bit different from the African Americans from my world. The corners of his eyes were high, and he also had thin nose and lips. His facial features were similar to Orientals, while his body was slender and slim.

He tied his long black hair behind him, and accessories made by stringing up stones sparkling with beautiful colours adorned his neck and wrist. I couldn't guess his age, but he seems to be young.

The youth from the eastern kingdom stopped before the stall and looked at the signboard with a stunned face.

He then pointed at the pot and asked: "Kiba?"

"Yes, this is food made from kiba. Would you like to try some?"

I took out a pick and scooped up the last piece of hamburg steak on the plate. The youth just tilted his head puzzledly.

"Asuta..."

Vena Wu whispered to me:

"Maybe this man from Semu can't speak the language of the west...?"

"Huh! The four kingdoms each has their own unique language?"

"Only the eastern and northern language are different from us... Asuta, you don't even know that...?"

I wasn't aware at all.

If I woke up in the eastern or northern kingdom instead, would I experience a language barrier there? Or did some omnipotent power smoothed over this barrier?

Now wasn't the time to worry about this, and I wouldn't get an answer no matter how much I rack my brains over this. It was rare to see someone show interest in us, so I had to figure out a way to make him agree to eat the sample.

"Asuta, can you put more meat on the plates...? And give me one of those picks..."

"Ehh? alright."

I scooped up the half mini hamburg steak inside the pot and split it into threes.

Vena Wu nodded, walked out of the cart and to the side of the youth.

When the youth backed away guardedly, Vena Wu smiled at him, and gracefully picked up a sample and placed it in her mouth.

She then pushed the plate slightly towards the youth.

The youth raised his hand above the plate.

He cast a probing glance at Vena Wu.

Vena Wu smiled again, and the youth picked up the toothpick with a nod.

And then— He picked up all the hamburg steaks and put it in his mouth.

The youth chewed the hamburger steak, and after nodding with satisfaction, he made a strange gesture with his fingers and bowed towards Vena Wu and me. He put up his hood again and left with nimble steps.

After a few quiet seconds, Vena Wu apologized with a whimsical voice:

“...Sorry...”

“Not at all! You made him eat the sample hamburger steak, that’s incredible! The Post Station Town stalls had never provided sampling services, so this sort of things might happen.”

To encourage myself, I answered in a loud voice. Vena Wu started sobbing and hugged a pillar of the stall.

“...I want to die...”

Vena-neo was unexpectedly frail.

No, now wasn’t the time to have fun at her expense.

“It’s fine! There is still one sample left! Our battle will only start in the afternoon! Let’s do our best together okay?”

“...Asuta onii-chan, what’s the matter?”

Tara appeared before the stall suddenly.

“Nothing. Is the [Kiba burger] good?”

“That’s a Kiba burger? It’s yummy! Asuta-nii, will you be opening the stall here every day from now on?”

“Yes, I made a ten-day contract. The next ten days will have to depend on how business goes.”

“Yay! I will come buy this every day! Papa also says he want to eat this everyday too! He is really surprised!”

“Thank you, seeing you look so satisfied makes me happy.”

If Tara and her father really buys two burger a day, I could sell twenty burgers in these ten days. I needed to sell 60 burgers to break even, so their support was a great help.

“Asuta...”

Vena Wu called out to me.

Her voice was slightly different than usual.

“What is it?”

I turned my head and noticed the abnormal situation without needing her to explain.

“Uwah...”

Tara yelped, and hid on the other side of the push cart.

A group of people came from the crowded southern side and walked briskly to our stall.

“W-What do you want?”



A group of men in cloaks surrounded my stall.

Tara trembled a little and cling to my leg.

Vena Wu— stayed close to me, quietly gripping the knife on her waist.

There were seven of them.

They were all tall and wore hooded cloaks that concealed their faces and body.

However— the lower half of their faces that could be seen were all dark in colour.

“Kiba.”

The men in the centre pushed passed his companion and walked to the stall.

He took off his hood and revealed his slender face. He was the Semu man who ate all the samples just now.

“W-What” Is there any problem with us selling that?”

Even though he couldn’t understand, I still asked on reflex.

The youth continued pointing at the pot and muttered:

“Kiba.”

“Yes, this is kiba. What about it?”

“Kiba. Red. One, two, three?”

“...What?”

After I tilted my head quizzingly, the youth reached inside his cloak troublingly.

Vena Wu wanted to pull me away— But what he took out was dull red copper plates.

“Kiba. Red, one, two, three?”

When I still didn't answer, the youth's eyes showed a tint of sorrow.

"...White?"

"No! It's red! Two!"

The youth nodded, then took out another copper plate and placed both on the stall table with a clink.

He stared right at me.

"...Vena Wu, please help me stir."

I was so frightened that I forgot to stir the sauce.

I handed the spatula to Vena Wu, and quickly started to chop the tino.

After making one [Kiba burger], I handed it to that young man.

"Please enjoy."

The youth nodded firmly and received the merchandize.

I observed him as I timidly reached for the copper plates— fortunately, no one stopped me. They were just normal customers after all.

My heart was filled with gratitude.

But, just who were these people standing unmoving around the stall?

"Asuta onii-chan..."

"I-It's fine. I think... they are just customers."

The youth ate the [Kiba burger] with large bites.

He held the burger with one hand at the start, but when he noticed the tarapa almost dripping out from the other end, he held it with both hands instead.

He then bit into the burger again.

Strange, even though he didn't feel like a cold person, his expression remained blank.

It wasn't to the extent of being creepy... but it still felt uncomfortable.

The youth quickly finished the burger, made a strange gesture with his fingers again and bowed quietly.

He then nodded to his companions.

The group of tall men nodded at the same time and reached into their cloaks.

Clink clang clink— they all placed their red copper plates onto the stall table.

Six persons' worth, a total of twelve red copper plates.

I cut the tino quietly and finished all the [Kiba burger] one by one.

I handed the finished products to them, and they received the burgers with their black fingers one at a time.

There was silence.

I didn't speak, the customers were quiet, Vena Wu and Tara didn't make a sound either.

After a few minutes, the six [Kiba burger] all ended up in the men's stomach. In addition to the first man, I collected 14 copper plates in total.

Like the youth earlier, the six hooded men made a gesture with their fingers, bowed, then left at the same time.

"Hey Asuta, your cooking sure is popular!"

"Uwah, that scared me!"

I didn't even notice that a slender blonde figure was standing beside the stall.

It goes without saying that was Kamyua Yost.

“W-W-Where did you come from? Please don’t appear in such a heart attack inducing way!”

“I didn’t want to get in the way of your business, so I had been watching over you quietly from the side. I was in the shade of those trees all along. Didn’t you notice?”

I really felt like punching this guy who was pretending to be retarded.

Vena Wu also rolled her eyes at Kamyua Yost who was all smiles. Her gaze appeared to be much less sexy.

Only Tara was excited.

“Uncle Kamyua, you are here! Asuta onii-san’s burger is really delicious!”

“That’s right, it looks tasty. You are using tarapa as an ingredient huh. Your cooking with just aria and tino is already delicious, the food this time looked even more appetizing.”

He complimented with a casual tone like usual.

“...Who were that group of people earlier?”

“Hmm? Probably travelers from the eastern kingdom Semu. Considering their numbers, they are likely related to a large merchant caravan.”

“You didn’t bribe them?”

“Bribe? What do you mean? You think I hired people to act like customers in an attempt to raise your stall’s reputation?”

Kamyua Yost smirked and shrugged his shoulders that was covered by his cloak.

“If I want to use such a plan, I will arrange for a better performance! The crowd is sparse here, your stall’s fame won’t increase even if I send a large group of people over. Look, no one even know you have sold seven meals in one go.”

He was right. As we were quite some distance from the bustling south, even if someone

observed what happened here, they would just see a cloaked group surround the stall, then left quickly.

Only the old man selling accessories beside us was staring with a dumbfounded face.

“Most easterners are like that. They aren’t a race that closes themselves off, but they only focus on their own objectives and ignore others... They think it’s rude to show their emotion. But if you talk with them, you will find them interesting. Unfortunately, they have no intention of learning the language of the west.”

“I see...”

“But not all easterners are like that. Some of them understand the customs of the west. If you open a stall in the Post Station Town, you will slowly understand the characteristics from the various different places.”

Kamyua said as he reached inside his cloak.

“Well then, can I place my order now, Asuta? I want two meals, one of them is for Leito.”

“Well... We only have one left.”

“Ehh? Tara bought two, the easterners bought seven, you only sold nine, right? Why are you already sold out?”

Just when did this uncle started spying on us?

The more time I spent with him, instead of understanding him more, I find him even more suspicious. This was the first time I met someone like that.

“I thought my sales for the first day would be low, so I only prepared ten portions. I didn’t want to waste the ingredient costs after all.”

“How could you do that!? Your cooking is delicious, it’s impossible that you will only sell ten! You brought such a big pot, but you are only selling ten portions! I’m so disappointed, Leito and I were both looking forward to your meal!”

“I’m sorry. There’s still some samples left, I will give them to you okay? I grilled some extra poitan too.”

“Yes! Sell them to me! I won’t allow any other patrons to take them away!”

His anxious expression seemed genuine.

I understood him less when I saw him make such an expression.

I used the last hamburg steak and the mini hamburg steak to make two [Kiba burgers], and collected two copper plates from Kamyua. The mini burger was given to him free of charge.

“Thank you! I will share this delicious meal with Leito! I will head back to the 《Kimyusu’s tail inn》 first, I will tell you my comments later!”

Kamyua quickly disappeared without a trace.

Vena Wu and I looked at each other, our heart filled with a sense of powerlessness.

“Erm... We are done for the day.”

“Yes... Can I put out the fire...?”

“Yes please.”

This must be how it felt to be completely clueless.

In the first day battle in the Post Station Town, we didn’t even last until noon, and closed shop in less than an hour.

Part 3

“...I’m back.”

After opening the door, Ai Fa who was seated with her back to the wall received me with a surprised face.

“What happened? Was there some incident in the Post Station Town?”

“No, we sold all our food, so we came back.”

“That's... too early. It's not even noon, right?”

“Yes. I went to quite a number of places before coming back.”

I brought the ingredients for tomorrow, chatted with Uncle Dora for a while, went to 《Kimyusu's tail inn》 to return the pushcart and asked for feedback from Kamyua and Leito. After coming back to Forest's Edge, I washed the pots at the water source before returning to the Fa house.

I didn't even spend much time heating the tarapa sauce. I gave the leftovers to Vena Wu, and she bought a leather pouch immediately in the Post Station Town to take the sauce. She then went back home happily.

I put the rest of the firewood with the pushcart and returned it to the inn. With just the ingredients and cooking utensils, I came home without much load.

I put the pot back onto the stove, kept the tarapa, gigo and other vegetables into the food store, then sat down opposite Ai Fa.

“All ten burgers I prepared got sold out. After accounting for all the expenses, I made about five red copper plates today. The first day of business is a success.”

I didn't know why, but I felt dissatisfied with today's result.

To make Ai Fa understand how I felt, I told her everything that happened today.

“Yes... everything was sold out because they acknowledge your culinary skills, right?”

Just be happy about your accomplishments then.”

“You’re right, but we don’t know how long those easterners will stay in the Post Station Town, so I can’t predict how business would be in the coming days.”

To be honest, I failed to “make a name” and “become the talk of town”.

Just what did the people in the city thought when they saw us pushed the cart back painstakingly after opening for less than an hour? Did they think we caused some problem and had no choice but to close shop?

My persecution complex was probably playing tricks on my mind, but the gazes from the citizens did feel painful.

On top of that, the easterners weren’t fluent with the western language, so there wouldn’t be much word of mouth effect.

“...Running a business is really complicated.”

Ai Fa scratched her blonde hair and leaned in close to me.

“That might be so, but you still completed your job. Be happier about it.”

“Yes...”

“I’m telling you to be happier about it.”

Ai Fa suddenly reached out and pinched my left cheek hard.

“It hurts it hurts! You are going to pull my cheek off! Why did you pinch me!?”

“I told you to be happier, but you wouldn’t listen.”

Ai Fa had a gentle smile on her face.

“I’m really happy you know?”

“Ai Fa, you—”

“Hmm?”

“You have been smiling a lot more recently...? It hurts it hurts!”

“Hmmp!”

Ai Fa’s rare smile was gone. She stood up and took down the cape hanging on the wall.

“It hurts ahh... Oh, it’s already time for you to head into the woods?”

“Yes. Asuta, what are you going to do now?”

“Oh right. It’s too early to prepare the ingredients. I will think about the future plans, then go chop some wood.”

“I already chopped the wood. Never mind, you are free, so chop more then.”

After saying that, Ai Fa came near to the seated me.

“I’m off... be careful today alright?”

“Yes, if any strange drunkards approach me, I will run away.”

“Okay.”

Ai Fa nodded with a strong gleam in her eyes.

After the Lutim wedding banquet, she would always show such a gaze when she leaves me behind and head into the woods.

Ai Fa then left for the forest, and I was home alone.

It’s noon...

I should be in the Post Station Town that was starting get bustling and give out samples. But now, I’m sitting inside the house alone.

The powerlessness in my heart far exceeds my sense of pride and accomplishment.

“Never mind, there’s no use in mulling over it. The battle starts tomorrow, tomorrow!”

It was a bit risky, but I decided to grill twenty meat patties for tomorrow.

If business turned out terrible, I will change it back to ten portions the next day.

If I sell them quickly tomorrow too, I will slowly increase the numbers day by day. To minimize the ingredient cost, I had to adapt quickly.

There is no need to be anxious. Unless the losses are too heavy, I can set up stall in the Post Station Town for the next ten to twenty days, and slowly work towards getting good results.

When I saw Ai Fa being sincerely happy for me, my thinking became more positive.

The situation developed unexpectedly, but I thought the sales on the first day would be terrible, and I sold everything instead. I should be happy about this.

Besides, even though I knew most of my customers, Tara, Uncle Dora, Kamyua Yost and Leito all had nothing but praises for the [Kiba burger].

I shouldn’t be so uneasy and should face tomorrow’s work with a heartful of hope.

“Okay...! Let’s chop some wood!”

I took out the machete and a bundle of wood from the store room and prepared to leave the house.

When I was about to push the door open— someone knocked on the door twice.

(— A guest?)

After living in the Fa house for a month, aside from Rimee Wu and the Kaslan couple, there had never been any other guest.

Noon had just past, and everyone knew the hunters had entered the woods to hunt, so Ai Fa wasn’t home.

As I was thinking about it, there was another two knocks.

I placed the firewood and machete by me feet and pressed my hand onto my chest to regulate my breathing.

“...Who is it?”

Silence.

I slowly reached for the door bar leaning against the wall.

Should I barricade myself in, or escape outside? The more options I had, the better it was.

When my hand was almost touching the door bar, a voice came from the other side of the door.

“I’m... Celice Von Fou from the Fou house.”

An unfamiliar name.

From her voice, she should be a frail woman.

After hesitating for a few seconds, I gently pulled open the door.

A young, slender woman was standing outside.

She was covered from her chest to her knees with a single piece of cloth and held a baby younger than Kota Wu in her arms.

I finally let down my guard.

“I’m a member of the Fa house, Asuta. Do you have business with Ai Fa?”

“Yes... No... H-Has Ai Fa gone into the forest?”

“She just left. I can pass a message if you need.”

“I see... Excuse me, this is for you two...”

The woman picked up the bag by her feet, which was full.

The bag was big, but pressed flat and looked light.

“What is this?”

“Erm... This is... pico leaves...”

The woman before me seemed more guarded than I was.

Well, the residents around here probably think I look suspicious, so it couldn't be helped.

“Pico leaves huh. Why are you giving us pico leaves?”

“Actually... the thing is... Ai Fa gave us a lot of hides...”

“Hides?”

I was confused.

“You mean kiba hide?”

“Yes... About a month ago, we received numerous hides... My house, which is the Fou house, didn't have many men, and can't hunt enough kiba. But ever since the Fa house gifted us with these hides, this child finally has enough to eat...”

“I see— This is the first time I'm hearing this. So my house head do interact with our neighbours.”

Celice Von Fou's eyes looked troubled as she hugged her baby tightly.

“No... We didn't interact... Our house head forbid the Fou house from fraternizing with the Fa house...”

“Ehh?”

“After relations deteriorate between the Fa house and the chieftain house, our house head thinks that the Fou house would get on the bad side of the chieftain house if we

fraternize with the Fa house... So two years ago, he forbade us from interacting with the Fa house..."

"I see. I have heard about that."

And so, Ai Fa deliberately broke off ties with the other houses.

So why did she gift the hides to the Fou house?

"...Ai Fa always leave the hide at our doorsteps quietly."

Celice Von Fou stared at me.

Her pale blue eyes were teary.

"I didn't know who put the hide there, and felt it was creepy... But in order to fill our stomachs, we had to accept them. We tanned the hides, traded it for copper plates, and bought aria and poitan... And now I'm able to nurse this child..."

"...I see."

"A few days ago, the men from the Fou house saw Ai Fa place a freshly skinned hide at the door steps of the Fou house... And so, we finally learned the identity of our benefactor. But even so, the head of the Fou house was still unwilling to renew relations with the Fa house... So all the women begged the house head, and asked him to at least let us give Ai Fa a gift as thanks..."

Celice Von Fou closed her eyes.

"The Fou house do not have sufficient copper plates and can't give a luxurious gift. But you can never have too much pico leaves... This is foraged by all the women of the Fou house."

"I see..."

"I know such a trivial gift isn't enough to repay Ai Fa's kindness, but I still want to give her my thanks. Even though the Fou house broke off ties with the Fa house out of fear of antagonizing the Tsun clan, she still did so much for us... We feel so ashamed..."

“Please don’t mind it. The Fa house don’t have enough people to tan the hides anyway. Besides, my house head has no intention of letting you know this.”

“But...”

“I’m grateful for your kind gesture. If the chance arises, I hope you can talk to her personally. I don’t know the entire story, so I can’t say anything on Ai Fa’s behalf.”

“...Alright, thank you.”

Celice Von Fou left the squashed bags behind and left.

I opened them, and found it packed with pico leaves. This was the volume Ai Fa and I forage in a day.

After foraging pico leaves for their house, it must be difficult to pick so much more for us.

...Ai Fa gave them our excess hides, not meat. Doing this won’t make the denizens of Forest’s Edge depraved.

If anyone criticize Ai Fa’s action, I will do everything I could to defend her.

One month ago— That was when Ai Fa took me in.

After butchering my first kiba, Ai Fa must have gifted it to the Fou house. Ai Fa had always been responsible for the disposal of the kiba’s hide and organs.

A prosperous life huh...

As a mere mortal, I couldn’t understand Kaslan Lutim’s grand vision.

And Kamyua Yost might not have any such ambitions at all.

However— I didn’t think an impoverished life where one was so famished that they couldn’t even nurse a child was normal.

Furthermore, when there were people starving, there was some who took the money that should be dispersed to the people and live lavishly.

Unfortunately, my prowess is limited, and I can't be of much help.

After keeping the pico leaves into the food store, I started wielding my machete to chop the firewood I needed to use tomorrow.

Part 4

It was the second day of operation of the kiba food stall operated by the Fa house.

Although all the food was sold out on the opening day, the helplessness I felt was far stronger than any sense of pride and accomplishment. But it also spurred me on, so I felt hyped early in the morning.

“I prepared twenty burgers today! It will be incredible if everything is sold out today! Vena Wu, let’s do our best!”

“Yes... Asuta, was this is all done by you...? Didn’t you need to handle the other chores...?”

“I made them all myself. I realized that making twenty burgers isn’t hard at all. I don’t mind preparing the food every day.”

I wasn’t pushing myself.

Yesterday, I prepared the tarapa sauce and meat patty ahead of time.

I prepared the food while making dinner and finished my work after dinner was done. Previously, before the decision to open the stall, I always chatted idly with Ai Fa after dinner, but now we had to do that while I was preparing the food.

And so, I just had to grill the poitan and hamburg steak.

After the tribulations of the banquet at the Wu clan and the Lutim wedding, I accumulated a lot of experience in cooking a large amount of food. Now, I could prepare twenty burgers in no time. Even if I pushed myself to the maximum limit for one day— forty burgers, I could finish them easily without sacrificing time for sleep or stall opening.

“It’s no problem at all! Let’s work hard!”

“...But there aren’t many people during this time...”

There wasn’t any sudden rain today, but the streets remained deserted.

Our stall was on the northernmost edge of the Post Station Town. Aside from the Genos city, only the stone paved road and the woods could be seen if one ventured further north. Only real travelers would pass by here.

The south of the Post Station Town was filled with farmland, so there were many farming villages. Hence, many of the stalls were concentrated in the south. The inn was also located in the south, so those lodging there would head directly to the bustling south to purchase their goods. It was no wonder that the southern side was so crowded.

Before the number of pedestrians increases in the noon, we can only focus on the few sparse passersby.

“Oh, other than the castle down to the west, where else does this road lead to?”

“I don’t know...? Probably the northern kingdom Mahildra...?”

“Mahildra is the kingdom in the northernmost edge of the continent, right? Genos is in the western kingdom, located on the southern side. That means there should be many cities along the way towards the north, right?”

“I don’t know... If I keep thinking about that, I might set off on a journey before I know it, so I try not to think about it...”

“...I see.”

“Yes... I see, so there are all sorts of cities in the western kingdom... If we head to the other cities, people won’t call us 《Kiba Eaters》 ...”

Vena Wu looked to the north with a melancholic face.

“Vena Wu, you want to go to a faraway place because you don’t like the people in the city calling you a [Kiba Eater], right?”

“No... Not because of that... Well, maybe... Anyway, I just want to live nakedly...”

“N-Nakedly?”

“Yes... In Forest's Edge, I’m the eldest daughter of the Wu clan... In the Post Station

Town, I'm a 《Kiba Eater》 ... Only my family accepts the real me... I hope for more people to know the naked me... That's why I want to go to a faraway place..."

She glanced at me sideways with a flirty look.

"That is why I'm attracted to you... You are not bound by the common sense of Forest's Edge and Post Station Town... You can see the real me..."

"W-When you did that barbaric act last time, you actually thought this far? I didn't speak much with you back then."

"Yes... I was drawn to you in the beginning because you came from a faraway place and didn't even know the name of this continent... However, I wouldn't have acted that way if you didn't have a certain level of charm..."

Vena Wu was hardworking, but when she became idle, she would become mischievous.

I really wished for Tara visiting us at a time like this. As I thought about that quietly, I scanned the road before us.

At this moment, I found a good target.

"Ah! That person looks like a foreigner, is he a resident of Genos?"

The target was a man who didn't have brown or ivory skin, but white skin with a tint of red.

He had a plump body with short limbs and dark brown hair. I couldn't see his facial features clearly because there was some distance between us, but I could tell he had a beard.

The man wore a sleeveless shirt and long pants. This western attire was similar to what Leito wore, and he kept heading north as he browsed the stalls on both sides of the street.

"Which country do the white-skinned people come from?"

"Ehh...? They are from the southern kingdom Jaguar..."

My guess was right.

The western kingdom and the northern kingdom were enemies, so people from the north wouldn't appear in this town. Through the process of elimination, I concluded that this person must be from the southern kingdom. The denizens of Forest's Edge came from the south and had light brown skin, so I thought they would have similar skin tone with the other southerners.

"The people with yellowish-brown skin are locals in Genos. There are many ivory-skinned people too, where are they from?"

"Both kinds of person are citizens of the western kingdom... When I was young, Grandma Jiba told me that Genos was exceptionally wealthy in the western kingdom, so many people will migrate to this land to search for job opportunities."

I see.

This meant that the ivory skinned people only settled down here in the past decades, and some of them were even born here. They didn't look as uncaring as the southerners and easterners when they were facing the denizens of Forest's Edge and didn't show fear or disdain like the Genos locals.

Hence, I should set my customer group to be the ivory-skinned people. I might be able to get through to the Genos locals through them.

That aside, the pressing thing right now was to run my business.

The man gradually approached us from the south.

He didn't have any large luggage, so it was impossible for him to head off to the north. I quietly cut the mini hamburger steak samples and prayed in my heart for him to come near us, so we could have a chance to talk with him.

"Asuta... It's better for you to receive the southerners..."

"Ehh? But why?"

"Many elderly southerners still hold a grudge against the denizens of Forest's Edge... They think we are traitors of the southern god Jaguar..."

Not disdain or fear, but hostility.

In the Post Station Town, the southern white people and the eastern black people were roughly equal in numbers, but I had never seen any southerners showing hostility towards us.

“Well... The east and south are enemies, so they have their hands full being hostile to the town that is filled with Semu people...?”

“Ehh? The east and west kingdoms are on bad terms?”

“...Asuta, you really don't know anything...”

Vena Wu smiled, her tone was partially shocked and partially joyful.

“Since ancient times, the east and south have been enemy nations, just like the west and north... As the west maintained cordial relations with both kingdoms, the east and south citizens are prohibited from causing any trouble here... Those who break this law will not be permitted into the western kingdom again, so such incidents are rare...”

As the Fa house didn't have much kins, Ai Fa didn't have the chance to obtain such information. In contrast, the Wu clan were well-informed because of their many relatives.

Enough about that, let's focus on business for now.

That southerner seemed to have plenty of time, but he didn't seem like he was looking for anything specific and was just browsing each stall carefully.

When he finally reached the old man's accessory stall beside us, I clenched my fists in a victory pose in my heart.

Awesome!

At this moment— my eyes met that man.

He was older than I thought, probably more than fifty years old.

The man had a large head, plain face, and short body. He looked bulkier than the Genos locals, and a beard covered his mouth.

Under his bushy brows were a pair of green eyes with a frightening sharp gleam.

He passed the accessory stall and took large strides towards us.

“Kiba...? You’re selling kiba?”

I wanted to reply with a smile, but he didn’t give me the chance and continued:

“Are you retarded? Who will eat the tough and stinky kiba meat? Only people like you can stomach it. You even used tarapa on it, how arrogant. You don’t even understand what cuisines taste like, so aria and poitan are enough for you. I suggest for you to close the shop and go home before you spend all your tusks and horns.”

His words flowed like a machine gun, not giving me any opportunity to interject.

After saying what was on his mind, he started turning to leave.

“Excuse me, but I can assure you that kiba meat is delicious! Do you want to try it?”

“What?”

The man turned his head and glared at me unhappily.

“Are you retarded? Why must I eat kiba meat? The city has Kimyusu, karon, and all sorts of meat that taste a hundred times better than kiba. Kiba won’t sell, retard! My skin will turn as black as yours if I eat kiba, and everyone will roll their eyes at me.”

“T-That’s just a misconception. I also ate plenty of kiba meat, but my skin tone is still the same.”

I already predicted that I would encounter terrible customers like him.

This man didn’t fear or detest the denizens of Forest's Edge, so maybe he could be considered one of the better ones.

“...Why is a brat like you wearing clothing from Forest's Edge and selling kiba? Did you

get seduced by that sexy Forest's Edge lady? Are you retarded? Never mind, no matter how retarded, that's a life that you chose. Since you like women from Forest's Edge, then just stay in the forest and no one will have any complaints."

"No, kiba meat is really delicious! It's a waste for just the denizens of Forest's Edge to eat them, so I decided to set up a stall here. The samples are free, why don't you try them? It's fine to think that I'm tricking you."

My retail smile was perfect.

The man sighed, then stood before the stall.

He leaned towards the sample plate on the table, then said: "Even the presentation is bad."

He had been making disparaging comments since the beginning, but his tone was calm, so I didn't feel any obvious hostility or malevolence.

I wasn't angered by his attitude, but couldn't help lamenting in my heart: "He looks like a boorish man, but he is so well spoken."

"This is free right? I won't pay copper plates for this."

"Of course, it is free."

I nodded with a smile.

He frowned his pale forehead and picked up the toothpick.

After tossing one-sixth of the mini hamburg steak into his mouth, he chewed carefully and swallowed it.

He glared at me once again.

"...It tastes terrible. You lied to me."

"Ehh?"

"Kiba meat didn't stink like I imagined, and it isn't too tough. But it is gooey and has

horrible texture. I can feel a strange taste going up my nose. It can't be compared to kimyusu and karon. Your tarapa is cooked well, it's a waste to pair it with kiba. Are there really people who will pay for this thing? You actually thought that this food tastes good, no wonder everyone mocks you people as [Kiba Eaters]."

Could it be— this dish was really not to his liking?

So the problem was both the texture of the hamburg steak and how the kiba meat tastes.

I thought this might happen, but I didn't imagine things would go bad so fast.

"...Asuta."

At this moment, Vena Wu tugged on my waist band

I still felt a little shocked, and after following Vena Wu's gaze—

The familiar cloaked group was approaching with brisk steps.

Part 5

“W-What do you want!? Are you trying to start trouble inside the western territories?”

The Jaguar man yelled.

The cloaked group stayed some distance from us and surrounded us in a semicircle.

Their numbers had clearly grown.

“...We no intent, start trouble.”

One of them answered stiffly in the language of the west.

“We, want buy, kiba meal. Now, queuing.”

That person walked to the front and took off his hood.

He had dark skin, the corners of his eyes were high, the bridge of his nose was thin, and he had thin lips.

He looked very similar to the youth who visited yesterday— but this man’s hair was silvery white, just like Grandma Jiba.

But he was a young man, with no sign of aging on his face. This was probably his natural hair color.



“We, queue. We, buy, ten.”

“A-Are you all retards? You are willing to pay for such nasty tasting meat, you must be insane. That’s like throwing copper plates into the brazier. Kiba meat is food for the denizens of Forest's Edge. Your skin can’t get any darker, so eating bad tasting meat will just be a pain.”

The young silvered hair man tilted his head quizzingly.

“I, yet to try. But, seven, brethren, yesterday try. All say, tasty. So, ten brethren, come... Please, ten meals.”

“Okay, thank you for your patronage.”

I was a bit shocked that someone disputed the tastiness of kiba, but I still started chopping tino.

At this moment, the ten customers quietly placed their copper plates on the table with loud clinking sounds.

“This is unbelievable. Can’t Semu people tell the taste of meat? This isn’t food normal people will eat. If you want to eat meat, then try kimyusu or karon.”

This man kept disrupting my business, but his attitude was calm and wasn’t scolding anyone loudly. The Semu people were expressionless and ignored him. As the stall owner, I was at a loss.

Anyway, I started making ten [Kiba burgers”.

The young silver-haired man was the first to take the meal. After finishing it with a blank expression, he nodded firmly, then turned towards the southerners.

“Kiba, delicious. Red, two, satisfied.”

“How can something so retarded happen? There must be something wrong with your tongues... Hey, get over here you guys!”

He shouted again.

A group of white-skinned men walked over, probably in response to his order.

The cloaked group quickly squeezed together and gave up space to them, with the [Kiba burgers] still in their hands.

“What’s the matter, Pops? It sure seems tense here.”

When the group of southerners got here, a young Jaguar man said in a crude tone.

This young man had brown hair and green eyes. He wasn’t tall, but he was burly.

All the men from Jaguar had small stature. Including the middle-aged man earlier, this group had eight people, and only two of them were taller than me.

But all of them were buff, with wide shoulders and faces.

Their hair color and age varied, but most of them had bushy beards.

“Look at this lot. They claim that kiba meat tastes good. I tried it just now, but I don’t think it’s worth paying money for. Can’t people from Semu differentiate good and bad tasting food?”

He sounded very indignant.

He was probably really triggered.

“Pops, did you actually eat kiba meat? How can that ever taste good?”

The Jaguar youth stole a few glances our way, then grabbed his companion’s thick arms.

“...Besides, let’s not get involved with the denizens of Forest’s Edge. They are more troublesome than those Semu people. We don’t know what will happen if things go out of hand.”

“I’m just preaching the truth. They are the ones who are weird... If you think I’m lying, then try it too.”

“I don’t want to eat kiba meat.”

“Alright, just try it... Hey you, let these guys taste this kiba meat.”

His demands were unreasonable.

However, this was a precious opportunity.

There might not be many Jaguar people in town, but things would be serious if they couldn't accept the taste of kiba on a biological level.

[Kiba burger] was just a changeup pitch. If people didn't like its unique texture, I could just switch and sell simple grilled meat instead.

I already used the strong taste of the tarapa in my cooking, but Pops still complained about the taste of the kiba meat.

Was this the personal preference of Pops, or were all Jaguar people unable to accept kiba? Even though his tone was rude, I couldn't let this chance go since he asked for samples.

I scooped the mini hamburg steak lying in the bottom of the pot, put it on the plate, and divided it into six.

There were still five samples from the first batch. I placed the plate on the platform and prepared toothpicks to match the number of people.

“Please take one.”

The three older Jaguar men took the sample without any hesitation.

Pops had to push the other young men and urged them to try it before they took the toothpicks.

By the way, the cloaked group had already finished their [Kiba burger] but didn't leave for some reason. They didn't look curious at all and just stood by the side with a blank expression.

“How is it? It tastes horrible, right?”

Pops crossed his arms and surveyed his companions.

And the men... showed all sorts of expressions.

"Just be honest if you think it tastes bad."

Only two men answered him.

An older man said:"Tastes bad." A youth said:"Doesn't taste good."

"Only two of you?"

Pops said with his eyes widened in surprise.

He was just like Donda Wu some days ago.

"What do you think? Do you really think it tastes good?"

Another older man shared:"...It's not awful." Some other youth commented:"It's kind of good."

And finally, the tallest of the older trio, a youth who looked younger than me, and the young man who spoke in a crude tone at the very start just stood quietly there.

"...It's good."

The crude young man muttered.

"W-What is this? Hey, is this really kiba?"

"Yes, it's 100% kiba. That's neither karon nor kimyusu."

My heart was tense, but I still answered with a smile:

"It's priced at two red copper plates. Would you like to buy one?"

"Two red copper plates, huh."

The tall man pushed the youth aside and walked over.

He had a burly figure and was rather old. His face was as fierce as Pops.

He handed over the copper plates and said: "Give me one."

"Thank you! Please wait a moment."

"Hey Arudas! Are you willing to pay for this nasty tasting meat?"

The man named Arudas turned towards Pops impatiently.

"Pops, I know the meat doesn't suit your taste, but you can't make a commotion in front of other people's stall. The guards might take you away."

"B-But..."

"You think it tastes bad, but it's heavenly to me. Everyone has different taste, so don't be so alarmed."

Everyone has different taste—

That's right, the taste of the kiba was unique. I thought kiba was more delicious than beef, pork, and kimyusu. With so many people here, it wouldn't be surprising to find some people who didn't like kiba meat.

I already told myself that way ahead of time.

But even so, I still felt a heat well up in me— I was still a half-baked chef after all.

"Hey, give me one too."

The youngest Jaguar man who was standing there stiffly also handed copper plates over to me.

"Thank you!"

I answered and handed a completed burger to the older man who ordered earlier. At this moment, another man walked over and said: "It looks delicious." He was the youth who said "It was kinda good." earlier.

“Bro, I want one too.”

“Okay! Thank you!”

“M-M-Me too!”

The youth with the rude attitude finally made up his mind and handed over the copper plates.

Of the seven men— no, they were eight including Pops, only four of them bought a [Kiba burger].

Half of them acknowledge my cooking.

I accepted this result a little vexingly.

It was popular with all the easterners, but only half of the southerners thought it is good. This meant that a person's preferred taste depended on their country of origin.

Lost in deep thoughts, I started chopping the tino and aria.

At this moment the tall Jaguar man Arudas who was the first to buy a [Kiba burger] said with a sigh:

“Uwah, this is delicious!”

His wide face that looked as hard as a rock was now showing pure bliss and surprise.

“Kiba actually tastes this good. Strange, why do people say kiba is tough and stinks. It tastes much better than karon.”

I stole a glance at the leader of the group, Pops. He was scratching his head with a frustrated look.

“The tarapa is great too, the sourness is just right. What’s that thing mixed together with the tino?”

“That’s sliced raw aria.”

“Raw aria! It’s a bit spicy, but it complements the meat really well. I suddenly feel an urge to drink fruit wine.”

“That’s right. Hey, I didn’t see you here at noon yesterday. Is the stall closed in the evenings?”

“Yes. As Forest's Edge is some distance away from here, we close the shop in the afternoon.”

“Such a pity. Dinner in the inn costs four red copper plates, I would rather eat two of these.”

The southerners looked fierce when they were quiet, but they were more expressive than the easterners.

When I saw people eating my food happily and saying “delicious”, my heart would sway with them.

“Ahh, this is too delicious! Hey, will you be opening your stall at this time tomorrow?”

“Yes. We will be open for at least eight more days.”

“I see. We will stay in this town until next month’s end. I will visit every day.”

“Thank you! I will await your patronage!”

The southerners turned and left.

Seeing how grumpy Pops looked, Arudas bumped Pop’s shoulder with his fist.

“Pops, let’s go. It’s almost time for work.”

However, Pops still wouldn’t move. He called out to me with a scary expression.

“Hey, your tarapa is good, I will be willing to pay if you use kimyusu or karon meat instead.”

“...I’m sorry, but I don’t plan to use anything other than kiba meat for now. But I will

introduce a new kiba dish in the future..."

"As long as you use kiba meat, that will just be a waste of effort."

Pops left after uttering these words.

Then— I quietly shifted my gaze and found the cloaked group standing in the same place without moving.

The young silver haired man standing at the front of the group walked over briskly.

"They claim, kiba taste bad, strange. I think, delicious."

"Thank you. Please come again."

"Every day, will come. Nine days, passed, stop business?"

"No. If possible, I hope to keep the stall running permanently."

"I'm happy, you continue operate. We, every day come. We, entire blue month, stay here."

Blue month— he probably meant the next month.

Kamyua did mention his work will begin on the fifteenth of the next month, so this month should be ending soon.

"I, leader of 《Silver Vase》 merchants, My name, Shumimaru Ji Sadumutino."

"Ehh?"

"Shumimaru Ji Sadumutino. Your name, tell me?"

"Oh... I'm Asuta of the Fa house."

"Asuta, thank you. I come every day."

With these words, the Semu group left quickly.

“Incredible... Did you just sell ten and a few moments later four burgers...?”

Vena Wu stirred the sauce in the pot quietly and finally spoke.

“There are six left.... We can sell them, right...?”

“That’s right, I’m really happy now.”

“...But, why do you look troubled...?”

“It’s nothing... I just feel vexed whenever someone says kiba tastes bad. The last time I heard that was Donda Wu claiming that hamburg steak is poison.”

“The people who think kiba tastes bad are the weird ones... Papa Donda just doesn’t like the soft texture of the hamburg steak. But from that man’s tone, he really thinks kiba tastes bad... There must be something wrong with his taste buds...”

“That’s not it. Everyone has their own preferences.”

After my duel with Donda Wu, I experienced this obvious fact.

The denizens of Forest’s Edge and the people of Semu probably only find it delicious because of the influence of their food culture.

I knew that very well.

But even so— my heart was still filled with a sense defeat.

I was depressed not because my pride as a chef was wounded, but because someone disparaged something I like, so my head was filled with childish frustration.

In that case, I should bury this feeling in the bottom of my heart... It’s strange, the southerners should be less biased than the westerners, but he still thinks that kiba meat is unpalatable. I must keep this in mind and think of a countermeasure later.

“Ah... Asuta, the vegetable peddler is here...”

“Ehh?”

I lifted my head and saw Uncle Dora and Tara walking towards us from the southern street.

I smiled with relief and suddenly felt troubled.

Two unfamiliar men were following behind Tara and him.

They both had yellowish brown skin and were about Dora's age.

They wore a stiff smile, just like when Uncle Dora first met me.

"Hi Asuta, how's it going?"

"Hello, business isn't too bad today. I already sold 14 meals."

"Ehh? Are you almost sold out?"

"There are six left. It's still some time before noon, but I already got my hands full."

"I see, that's great. Sorry... but you provide samples, right? Can you let them try?"

After they stood before me, the faces of both men were tense from nervousness.

"Of course, if they don't mind. I want everyone to try my cooking... And who are they?"

"They are my old friends. This guy over here runs a cloth stall, and that guy is a pot dealer."

"Ah! Did I buy a pot from you before?"

"Y-Yes. You have a good memory."

Most men in Genos had burly build, but the pot dealer was skinny, so he left a deep impression on me.

"They don't believe that kiba meat is tasty, so I dragged them here. Can you let them try some?"

"Of course! Please wait a moment, I will heat it up."

There just happened to be two samples left on the plate. After dipping it in the boiling hot sauce, I placed it on the plate again.

The pot dealer and the cloth stall owner seemed unsure if they wanted to cry or laugh. They looked at each other.

Tara didn't care about them and kept tugging her father's arm.

"Papa, I'm hungry..."

"Right. Asuta, give us one each, please."

"Thank you. I'm really happy that you like it."

"I'm... happy to be acquainted with someone from the Forest's Edge too."

Uncle Dora stole a glance at Vena Wu.

Vena Wu showed a troubled smile.

"We are all citizens of the west, but I can't think of the Forest's Edge denizens as fellow countrymen. When I see the terrifying figures of the men of Forest's Edge, my knees will still go weak... But even so, I'm glad that there are kind people like you two in Forest's Edge."

Uncle Dora received the [Kiba burger] and showed his teeth in a smile.

"Do visit our stall again, I hope you can try the aria I grew."

"...Yes, I will tell my house members..."

Dora bit into the [Kiba burger] with a gleeful smile.

"Oh... This [Kiba burger] tastes wonderful. Asuta, you actually made such a delicious meal from my vegetables, that fills me with bliss."

"No, I can only serve great tasting food because the ingredients are fresh. Uncle Dora, I will be counting on your tarapa and aria in the future too."

“I will be proud to serve.”

Uncle Dora turned towards his two friends.

“Well? How long are you going to just stand there? You even left your work behind to come here, so at least try the samples.”

“Y-You are the one who dragged us forcefully here.”

The pot dealer chided Uncle Dora and finally reached for the sample kiba meat.

With his slightly trembling fingers, he grabbed the toothpick and send the small piece of meat into his mouth.

“H-How is it?”

The cloth stall uncle grabbed his arm.

“Delicious... No, the taste is strange...”

“Ah, I minced the meat, kneaded them into a round patty, and then grilled it. So the texture is a bit unique.”

The pot dealer’s eyes started to waver.

Then, as if he had made up his mind, he reached his thin fingers into his shirt.

“I-I want one! I need to eat some more to understand its taste.”

“Okay! Thank you.”

“H-Hey, are you serious...?”

The cloth stall owner took the toothpick too.

“Uwah, it’s actually this good!”

He opened his eyes wide in surprise, and carefully studied the content of the pot.

“Is this really kiba meat...? The tarapa is amazing too!”

“Of course, this tarapa was grown by me.”

The cloth stall owner smiled when he saw Uncle Dora puff his chest proudly:

“Why are you acting so smug? A-Alright, I will buy one too...! I-I want to ask, will I grow horns, and will my skin turn black if I eat this...?”

“Do you still believe such superstitions? I have never seen horned denizens of Forest's Edge before. My grandmother said that their appearance hasn't changed since they migrated here from the southern jungles.”

“I-I get it! Give me one!”

“...Thank you.”

I could finally thank him sincerely.

When I heard people talking badly about kiba, my mood would go sour; when I heard people praising kiba, I would feel elated. My emotions swung because of the comments by others, proving that I was just a half-baked chef after all.

No matter what, the fight was just beginning.

Starting from tomorrow, I will prepare 40 [Kiba burgers].

It was much earlier than I expected, but due to the sales of the burger rising to this extent, it was about time to prepare a menu.

There were countless problems that I needed to work through.

After a moment, Kamyua Yost appeared like a spirit, bought a share for himself and Leito, and we were sold out in less than an hour of operation.

Part 6

The next day.

It was the dusk of the third day since my stall opened.

I laid sprawled out in the main room of the Fa house. Someone knocked the door twice.

“Asuta, it’s me.”

Ai Fa’s voice came inside of the room.

I was indescribably tired, but I still got up from the rug, walked to the entrance and took down the door bar.

When I opened the door, my beloved house head I hadn’t seen for half a day lashed out:

“Why are you showing such a good-for-nothing face? No one patronized your stall today? Even if that is the case, you don’t need to make such a face, it irks me just to look at you.”

“Ugghhh, what about you? How’s the situation? Did the number of kiba decrease at all?”

“I got a kiba. But it suffered too many unnecessary wounds, so I couldn’t blood let it successfully.”

“I see. Thank you for your hard work, it’s great that you’re not hurt...”

“Just why are you showing such a face? You better stop that, or I will really get angry.”

“Leave me alone, I’m just a little tired. If I’m with you, I will cheer up in no time...”

“Don’t joke with me. Your face is spoiling my mood, cheer up right now.”

My house head was merciless.

“Just what happened? You look so sullen, there must be a reason, right?”

“I don’t know if this is a valid reason... But I was taken away by the guards today.”

“What?! What happened?”

Ai Fa suddenly grabbed me by the chest.

“What kind of trouble did you get into? I thought you were working seriously?”

“And I was! I sold all 40 burgers because of my serious attitude...! But that is also why I got taken by the guards.”

“...I’m still confused. Tell me the reason, quick.”

She unhanded me, hung her cape on the wall and leaned the sabre against the wall.

My eyes followed her figure as she sat down beside the stove.

“When I opened the stall today, the southerners and easterners were all crowded there. All twenty burgers I prepared were sold in no time.”

“Yes.”

“I prepared additional ingredients today. When I made twenty more burgers, Tara came and bought four burgers for Uncle Dora and friends.”

“Yes.”

“So there were 16 left... At this moment, the 《Silver Vase》 merchants and a group of Jaguar people appeared at the same time, with ten people in each group.”

“Hmm? Didn’t they visit before the shop opened?”

“No. The customers who visited early in the morning were all unfamiliar faces. They came to shop due to the recommendations of these two groups. To avoid seeing each other, people from these two nationalities have different inns they usually lodge in. [Kiba burgers] became a hot topic in those inns.”

“...Yes.”

“We only had 16 burgers, but each group had ten customers. I had no choice but to sell ten burgers to the 《Silver Vase》 who came slightly earlier. When I told the southerner customers: [I’m sorry, there are only six burgers left], they started making a scene and demanded me to divide the 16 burgers between the two groups evenly.”

“Yes.”

“But the easterners wouldn’t budge... Since I failed to quell the commotion, a passerby alerted the guards.”

“Is that so, then the guards had to punish the ones who started the unrest.”

“Yes~ But they didn’t do that. In the end, the guards thought I’m the one at fault, and must take full responsibility. I was almost barred from entering the Post Station Town ever again.”

“...Did they reach that conclusion in accordance with the rules of the city?”

Rage was flickering in Ai Fa’s eyes.

“I-I’m not sure. But don’t worry, I already convinced them to let me off. It was my negligence for not preparing an adequate amount of food... I have already reflected on that.”

“That... is a difficult problem.”

Ai Fa gently shook her head, with her anger extinguished.

“It must be hard on you— Asuta, I’m hungry.”

“...House head, you are really cruel to me....”

“I did comfort you. I know why you are so exhausted... Alright then, stop being depressed and cheer up.”

Was my expression really that sullen? I pinched my cheeks with my hands.

I used up all my stamina and wits in the guard room before I was released, and my energy was completely used up.

I needed to consume nourishment during times like this.

“Okay! I will start preparing dinner!”

“...I want you to cheer up, not be overly cheerful.”

I see.

I added wood into the stove obediently and heated the soup I had already cooked.

“This is the third day since you started selling [Kiba burgers], and you have already sold 40 of them in one day, isn’t that an amazing accomplishment?”

Ai Fa sat with crossed legs beside the stove with one knee up. She asked quizzically.

“But you don’t look happy at all?”

“Of course I’m happy that sales were beyond my imagination. But I can’t afford to be happy, my position is already precarious.”

“Precarious?”

“Our main objective is to let the people in the Post Station Town understand how delicious kiba is, correct? So far, only four Genos locals have tasted the [Kiba burger]. The easterners and southerners held the [Kiba burger] in high regards, but they will leave the Post Station Town after some time. Even if we earned some petty cash, we still can’t achieve our goal.”

After being interrogated by the guards, I finally learned the identity of my customers.

Like what the Semu group informed me before, they belonged to the merchant group 《Silver Vase》. They hailed from their home nation in the east with precious metals and other merchandise, and visited the city in the west and north, spending a year traveling and conducting business.

The Jaguar group were famed architects, and many of the buildings in the Post Station

Town were erected by their hands.

Pops, the one who rejected the kiba meat completely, was the boss, and this just happened to be the time for their annual visit to the Post Station Town to repair the aging buildings.

“Next month, the 《Silver Vase》 and the architects will leave the Post Station Town. Ninety percent of the customers who bought a [Kiba burger] were travelers passing by Genos, or were here for odd jobs or labor, and not local residents. Very few Genos locals actually tried our burgers.”

“But— you wanted to promote the [Kiba burger] to the southerners and easterners in the first place, right?”

“That is true. But before the cooking can spread by word of mouth, all that will be for naught if I get taken away by the guards again. If there is another commotion, I will really be barred from entering the Post Station Town... My situation is precarious after all.”

The icy gazes of the guards and Milano Mast were engraved deeply in my heart.

Their eyes seemed to be saying: “Denizens from Forest's Edge are abnormal after all and will just disturb the peace in the town.”

That was illogical. If we weren't denizens of Forest's Edge, we wouldn't be treated so harshly.

However, we were denizens of Forest's Edge, and we had set our mind on running a business in enemy territory.

I couldn't afford to fail again.

The enemy in this battle was the entire Post Station Town, I learned this fact once again.

“...You have finally reverted to your usual expression.”

Ai Fa's voice was very close to me.

I turned my head in surprise and found her right beside me.

“Asuta, I didn’t know you are so greedy.”

“G-Greedy?”

“How much copper plates have you earned in these three days?”

“Hmm? I sold seventy meals in three days, so that’s 140 red copper plates. Minus the set-up cost, three days of labor and ingredient cost, the profit is 77 red copper plates.”

“So that’s like hunting more than 6 kiba in just three days?”

“You can’t compare it like this. No matter how many copper plates I make, the number of kiba will not go down. My work can’t be compared to that of a hunter.”

By the way— my target was to sell at least 60 portions in the first ten days.

I never thought that I would reach this goal in just three days.

As I was stirring the soup, Ai Fa smiled beside me.

“This is how the denizens of Forest's Edge think. The people in the city also worked hard to earn copper plates, right?”

“Our objective isn’t earning money anyway. I’m glad that we can buy new pots and knives with the copper plates though.”

“...You are really greedy.”

Ai Fa said with a laugh. A calming light could be seen in her eyes.

But I still felt unhappy.

“Why would you think that? Because I don’t look happy about the sales exceeding my expectations? I don’t think I’m a greedy person.”

“Not that. You don’t care about how many copper plates we earned and strive single-mindedly at our primary goal. I think you are a man who pursues success greedily.”

“...In that case, you should describe me with the term [ambitious]. Being greedy sounds terrible.”

I complained as I stirred the pot that was slowly heating up, Ai Fa replied “I understand”, then walked to me.

She reached for my head. I already took off the towel on my head, so she ruffled my hair directly and lean her face towards me.

“Asuta, you are really ambitious.”

She showed a mischievous smile, and her white teeth were visible.

It was rare to see Ai Fa showing such a smile, which reminded me of Ludo Wu.

On top of that, she usually didn’t show such an obvious smile, so that surprised me.

“...Asuta, I’m hungry.”

“Oh right. The soup is heated up. I will grill the meat; can you help me carry the pot over?”

I just cooked the kiba soup earlier. The pot was still hot and there was only two person’s worth of soup, so it got heated up in no time.

There was a board behind the stove, and we moved the pot onto it. I put the new pot on the stove, took out the plates full of food. Ai Fa looked at the content curiously.

“What are we having for dinner? There is an unfamiliar scent.”

“That’s right, I bought a new ingredient today. Well, actually, it’s some kind of spice.”

The kiba abdomen meat was inside the plate, soaking in a red marinating sauce.

That was a sauce I made from fruit wine, diced aria, and the new ingredient, myam.

“Is it Myam?”

“Yes, Myam. Remember the kimyusu meat bun I ate? Myam was added to it.”

This herb had the fragrance of garlic and coriander. It had a complicated aroma that roused one’s appetite.

Myam had green straw-like stems and was really spicy when eaten raw. After cutting it together with aria into a pulp I added it to the marinating sauce.

“I had always been curious about this ingredient, but I didn’t know its name. After asking Uncle Dora, I finally figured it out. Myam is suitable to be added to the tarapa sauce.”

I explained to Ai Fa as I fried the thin slices of an aria.

After the aria turned soft, I spread out the marinated meat and put them into the pot.

The next instant, the room was filled with the fragrance of fruit wine and Myam.

“How is it? You don’t hate this fragrance, right?”

“...I feel even hungrier now.”

I know, right? I didn’t know coriander very well, but I thought the fragrance of garlic and grilled meat was the best stimulant of one’s appetite.

In my old world, there were many people who disliked such a strong smell. But Myam was different from garlic and eating it wouldn’t give you bad breath. Women and children also liked kimyusu meat bun after all. Hence, I decided to use this stimulating spice in my cooking.

By the way, this spice had to be bought at the stall that sells rock salt and dry goods, and not the vegetable stalls. I have never seen this ingredient in the Wu food store either.

“Okay, the meat surface is seared, I’m adding it in.”

I poured the rest of the marinating sauce into the pot.

This dish was cooked the same way as ginger-roasted meat.

Should I dub it [Myam-roasted kiba meat]? I thought to myself quietly.

“Asuta.”

“Hmm?”

“I’m hungry.”

“Hmm, that’s the fourth time you said that. It’s already done, please wait a moment.”

When the kiba was completely cooked, I scooped the meat and aria onto the plate.

The kiba meat was sprinkled with rock salt and pico leaves, so it didn’t need any more seasoning.

After drying the sauce remaining in the pan a little, I poured it onto the meat and aria, and it was done!

“Ah, the grilled poitan is in the food store. Sorry, can you help me get the kiba soup?”

“Yes.”

I hurried to the food store, then carried the poitan I grilled in the morning and the tino shreds I just chopped onto the dining table.

“This is the raw tino used in kiba burger, right?”

“Yes, I think it will suit this dish very well.”

The ginger-roasted meat had to be paired with cabbage shreds.

So [Myam-roasted meat] and tino shreds should go together well too.

However, that was what I thought as someone who grew up in another world, I wonder if the people in this world would feel the same.

“Alright! Let’s dig in.”

“...Asuta, there isn't much meat on your plate.”

“Ah, right, I was comparing the ratio of aria and myam and adjusting the marinating time. I ate plenty of meat during my sampling sessions, so this much is enough.”

Ai Fa was surprised.

“You spent so much effort on developing this dish...? Are you planning to sell this in the Post Station Town?”

“Oh! You have keen senses. That's right, making more than 40 [Kiba burgers] takes too much effort, so I have decided to start selling this dish tomorrow. Let me explain how to eat it.”

I grilled the poitan thinner than the one used in [Kiba burger], spread a layer of tino shreds, added the meat and aria, and rolled it up from below like a crepe. And the [Myam-roasted meat] was done.

“Ai Fa, we are having dinner, so you have to eat too. I will use the rest of the aria to make soup, so don't leave anything behind.”

“...Denizens of Forest's Edge don't leave leftovers.”

“Yes. I just wanted to try saying that line. Here, eat this.”

Ai Fa nodded, and after saying grace, she picked up the [Myam-roasted meat].

When she noticed my gaze, she frowned a little.

“...Don't stare at me.”

“Oh right, my bad. I'm just curious about your reaction.”

“Hmmp.”

Ai Fa turned her face away and bit into the [Myam roast meat].

She grabbed the grilled poitan with both hands. She looked adorable while doing this.



Leaving that aside— how's the taste?

In my opinion, it wasn't too bad.

There weren't any ginger, cooking wine and soy sauce in this world, so I didn't expect the dish to taste like meat grilled with ginger. The kiba meat was soaked in sweet fruit wine and spicy Myam, giving it a sweet and spicy taste after it was grilled. It was suitable to be eaten together with tino and grilled poitan.

The meat was less than 5mm thick and required thorough biting. If I messed up the heat, the people in the city wouldn't be able to bite into it, so I had to be careful about that.

"How's the taste?"

I asked Ai Fa for her comment as I made a wrap for myself.

"Delicious."

Ai Fa's answer was curt as usual.

No matter how the food tasted, Ai Fa didn't use too many words to express her opinion. I had no way of making her speak her mind more—

"This dish has a great fragrance, and the overall seasoning suits the kiba meat well. It's as tasty as eating steak... Does steak match this kind of seasoning too?"

It was rare for her to give such a specific comment.

"But... steaks probably don't match the sweet taste that well. I don't want you to season the hamburg steak this way either. As for the Kiba burger and tarapa... I'm not too sure about that."

"I-I see. Amazing, this is the first time you gave me such detailed feedback."

And I agreed with all the points she raised.

Ai Fa closed her eyes again, as if she was searching for the appropriate words.

“Also... this is delicious, but my throat is parched after eating it. If... the seasoning is not so strong, I think it will taste better.”

“I see. After all, the denizens of Forest's Edge don't use any seasonings aside from rock salt when making jerky. The taste is probably too strong for you. Sorry, I will adjust the seasoning time when I cook dinner next time.”

Ai Fa sighed a little tiredly, then stared at me again.

“...That's all I have to say. Don't ask me more questions, my head will hurt if I think anymore.”

“I got it. Thank you! Your comments are a valuable source of reference to me.”

“...Didn't you already decide to sell normal grilled meat after the kiba burger? You mentioned that only those dishes can bring out the tastiness of kiba.”

“Yes, I did plan to do that.”

I sat down properly again.

“I told you already, right? When I let my customers try the hamburg steaks yesterday, they didn't complain about its soft texture, but the unique taste of the kiba meat itself. That's why I'm trying such a seasoning and flavor. I want to find a way to suppress the unique taste of kiba without destroying its deliciousness.”

“Yes.”

“There were as many southern customers as eastern customers today. They probably came after hearing others discussing the tastiness of kiba. No one complained to me about the taste directly, but there had to be some who felt dissatisfied. If I'm unlucky, maybe half of them won't like my cooking.”

Besides, the easterners were always expressionless and silent. I couldn't tell how many of them were actually happy with the food I was serving.

My patrons were increasing, but I didn't know how many repeat customers the stall will have. Furthermore, not only did the easterners have similar appearances, they often concealed their face with a hood, making it harder for me to tell them apart.

“Anyways, even if I used the strong tasting tarapa in the [Kiba burger], there are still customers who dislike the unique taste of the kiba. Instead of steaks where the taste of the meat is the main accent, I think we should present a dish that suppresses the kiba’s unique taste. Since the salted meat I tasted in the 《Kimyusu’s Tail Inn》 was very salty, the townspeople are probably alright with strong seasonings.”

“...Hmm. You already thought that far.”

Ai Fa quickly finished the first [Myam-roasted meat] and stared at me.

“Then, why were you so depressed just now?”

“Hmm? I was just tired. I still need to finish this dish quickly after that commotion in the afternoon. And there are also many things for me to consider.”

I started making another [Myam-roasted meat] for Ai Fa, and leaned towards her.

“Ai Fa, I didn’t expect my stocks to run out just by selling to the southerners and easterners. I have decided to supplement the [Kiba burger] with this new dish tomorrow, but that won’t solve the root of the issue.”

“...Hmm?”

“We only have one cart right now, so I have to wait until the [Kiba burger] sells out, and then start selling [Myam-roasted meat]. But that would make having two different dishes meaningless... It’s earlier than I predicted, but I’m seriously considering renting one more cart.”

Ai Fa accepted the [Myam-roasted meat], then nodded seriously.

“If that’s what you think, then give it a try. I trust your judgment.”

“This is an important thing, right? If we increase the number of stalls and helpers, our expenses will go up too—”

“But you think this is a shortcut towards success, right?”

Ai Fa looked at me quietly.

“I trust your judgment. Don’t make me say that so many times.”

“...I understand. Thank you.”

After nodding firmly, a serene smile suddenly appeared on Ai Fa’s face.

“...You are really a greedy man.”

“Like I told you, greedy is—”

“You are an ambitious man.”

Since she changed her phrasing, I didn’t need to refute her.

Because of my inadequate planning, the results in these three days weren’t as good as I hoped.

If my judgment was wrong, the entire plan would fail. I learned that from the commotion that happened today.

The southerners and easterners bought all my food, and the westerners didn’t get to taste my cooking. It was rather strange to be troubled by something like this.

If business was good for the first ten days, I will introduce a new dish. That was the original plan, but I couldn’t afford to take it so easy. Demand had outstripped supply on the third day of the opening, so I had to solve this issue fast.

I already shared my thoughts with Vena Wu.

Once Donda Wu permits, the Wu clan could send me new helpers from the day after tomorrow.

If I could make it through tomorrow, I would be able to fight back the next day.

“Alright! Time for round two!”

“What is a [raundo]?”

I turned back when I heard Ai Fa's voice. She was sitting with one knee up, resting her arm on her knee and supporting her chin, staring at me.

"Ehh? Ai Fa, you are already done?"

"You are too slow. You still have work to do later, right? If you don't act faster, you will lose out on sleep!"

"Don't worry. I already used the excess time to knead the [Kiba burger's] patty. I just need to cut the meat slices for the [Myam-roasted meat] and make the tarapa sauce, just trivial stuff. Grilling the poitan tomorrow morning is the hardest part."

"....."

"Hmm? What's the matter?"

"...I thought I will be the only one to benefit if you stay in the Fa house. That's why it's better for you to stay in the house Lutim."

"W-What are you saying? Y-You're not chasing me out, right?"

"Do you think I will say that now?"

Ai Fa's gaze was calm and steady.

I sipped the cold soup and scratched my head.

"Then why bring that up? Don't make me feel uneasy!"

"I'm glad that you want to stay in the Fa house... I'm also happy that you found a job that utilizes your strength even though you are staying in the Fa house."

Ai Fa crawled towards me as she said that.

She ruffled my hair.

When I patted her head last time, she punched my solar plexus. But she was doing something so intimate without any hesitation.

“Y-You know, whenever you do that, I feel like I’m treated like a child.”

“Is that so? My father Gill always did this whenever he praised me.”

It had been a while since I saw her pout.

“Ah, it doesn’t make me uncomfortable, I just feel a little embarrassed.”

“...I see.”

Ai Fa lowered her eyelids.

Did I say too much? I started reflecting on myself.

The next moment—

Ai Fa knelt on one knee slowly and hugged my head with both arms suddenly.

Ai Fa’s body warmth, fragrance, and strength engulfed my body and soul.

“I’m so happy that I didn’t lose you that night... I’m so happy you chose the Fa house.”

“Ai... A-A-Ai Fa?”

My voice was breaking from surprise.

She hugged me with all her might, her soft hair brushed against my cheeks.

My heart almost stopped.

There was a rainbow color glow in her eyes.

If this continued for a few more seconds, a nerve inside me might just break— as I was thinking about that, her warmth, strength, and fragrance suddenly left me.

Ai Fa sat down again and rubbed her nose childishly.

“...That’s how I feel now.”

“D-Don’t... scare me like that.”

I collapsed onto the floor and had to prop myself up with my arms.

“Y-Your father is really passionate, right?”

“Hmm? What’s that about father Gill?”

“Ehh?”

“I’m doing this because I want to, it has nothing to do with him.”

“.....”

“If my actions irked you, I will be more careful in the future. But I can’t hold back my emotions... Sorry for interrupting your meal. Eat up, I feel sleepy.”

After saying this nonchalantly, Ai Fa pointed at my plate.

This girl... is a million times worse than Vena Wu!

Ai Fa didn’t notice me screaming in my heart and put her head down.

“I think you already accomplished a lot. Since you don’t think so, then work doubly hard... I told you before that you may use the copper plates you earned as you wish. Tell me if you don’t have enough.”

“...Can I really believe your words? What if I buy a new hair accessory for you?”

“I will beat you up.”

“I see... I get it! I will decide if I should expand to two stalls depending on the sales tomorrow! So, don’t regret it, okay?”

“Why are you suddenly so angry?”

Ai Fa who had let her hair down leaned in immediately.

“...So, did I make you unhappy?”

She still looked a little dissatisfied and uneasy.

I still didn't start eating and sighed heavily.

"I'm not angry. Sorry..."

"...You really are a strange man."

I wasn't strange at all.

However, I couldn't refute her when I saw Ai Fa's relieved smile.

No matter what— our war was just beginning.

Mid Meal Snack

A Girl in the Post Station Town

“Tara, listen carefully. Don’t get involved with the denizens of Forest's Edge so easily, okay?”

After Asuta and the others left the stall, Dora said with a slightly stern expression.

Tara couldn’t accept what her father said and asked:

“But why? Asuta onii-chan is a good person, that’s why you thanked him, right? Why can’t Tara be friends with Asuta onii-chan?”

“Asuta isn’t a bad person. Even though he was wearing the garments of Forest's Edge, he probably came from some other city... Ai Fa who was beside Asuta must be a brave huntress. But getting close to the denizens of Forest's Edge is still dangerous.”

Dora leaned in close to Tara.

“You also saw the denizens from Forest's Edge who caused all those troubles, right? There are many barbaric people in Forest's Edge, so don’t go near them carelessly.”

“But... Not just the denizens of Forest's Edge, anyone who drinks and stirs up trouble is scary.”

Despite Tara’s rebuttal, Dora still shook his head and dismissed Tara’s protest.

“Even when the denizens of Forest's Edge commit crime, the guards will still let them off, that’s why they are acting so willfully. If you get involved with such dangerous characters, we will suffer too... I have already thanked them for saving you, so we have no need to approach them directly in the future.”

Dora stuck his head out of the roof and checked the position of the sun.

“It’s almost two. It’s still early, but help me promote our goods to our customer’s stall.

Don't run around, okay?"

"...Okay."

Tara left the stall. She still wasn't convinced by his answers.

The streets were filled with all sorts of people. Aside from the residents of Post Station Town, there were some who came from the farms to work here just like Tara— there were also travelers from the south and the east, so there was a huge variety of people.

The denizens of Forest's Edge were a common sight too. The numerous people living in Forest's Edge often purchased their groceries in the Post Station Town.

Almost everyone from Forest's Edge were female, and hunters wearing kiba capes were a rare sight.

Ten days ago, Tara was very frightened when she encountered a hunter from Forest's Edge.

That hunter started drinking in the afternoon, drew his blade in town, and roared like a beast. The light shining in his blue eyes was no different from a beast.

And the one who saved Tara from that ruffian were denizens of Forest's Edge.

They were Asuta, who looked nothing like a denizen of Forest's Edge even though he wore their garments, and a young woman with outstanding looks, who wore a kiba cape despite being a girl, Ai Fa.

Ai Fa's eyes shined like a beast too. To be honest, Ai Fa's gaze was tougher and more terrifying than that ruffian.

Ai Fa stopped the ruffian's violent act and rescued Tara.

But the guards treated Ai Fa and Asuta like criminals and attempted to bring them to the guard room. If the traveler called Kamyua Yost didn't stand up for them, the guards would have released the ruffian and convicted Asuta and Ai Fa of the crimes.

Why is this happening? The drunkard claims to belong to the chief clan... Is the chief clan the bad guys in Forest's Edge?

Tara thought as she walked on the road.

Asuta had black, shiny eyes like the Semu people, and Tara liked them a lot.

Even though Tara felt Ai Fa was a little scary, she also thought she looked cool.

Her father Dora didn't detest them but still instructed Tara not to go near the denizens of Forest's Edge. Tara couldn't understand why and felt gloomy.

I want to try Asuta's kiba cooking.

Dora would never permit her to do that.

Tara walked by herself in the crowded Post Station Town and sighed softly.



The next day, after Tara was done with her chores in the morning, she played with the kids in the city like usual.

As Tara worked in the Post Station Town, she played more often with the children of the city than the kids of the village.

The ones playing with her today was a boy from an inn and a girl from a kimyusu stall.

"You know, my brother working in the castle town came home yesterday."

After they got tired of playing tag, the boy spoke as they rested.

"And he bought meat from the karon's back as a gift! Isn't that amazing? Not thigh meat, but meat from the back."

The Post Station Town only sold karon thigh meat. Meat from its chest and back was expensive. That's why it was sold only in the castle town.

"That meat is soft and yummy! After eating it, I don't want to eat thigh meat anymore!"

"Is that so? There is meat softer than kimyusu?!"

“Ah~ they are about the same. But not only is the meat soft, how do I put it... Anyways, it is super tasty!”

“Really? But the skin of the kimyusu is yummy too.”

The girl seemed to be competing with the boy.

“Meat with skin on it is expensive, no one will buy them, right? But if you roast the meat along with the skin, it becomes incredibly tasty.”

“Kimyusu skin is used to make jackets and leather bags. Karon is definitely tastier!”

“Not! We splurge on eating meat with skin once a month! If you don’t believe me, then try it next time!”

Tara listened to their conversation happily, then remembered what happened yesterday and interjected:

“Do you think kiba tastes good?”

The two of them looked surprised and stared at Tara.

“You mean the kiba that destroys the farms? How can that taste good?”

“That’s right! You will grow horns and your skin will become as black as the denizens of Forest's Edge, you know?”

“Ehh~ Is that true?”

Asuta’s skin was the same as the other westerners, and he didn’t have horns.

His hair and eyes were black, but Semu people were black even though they don’t eat kiba. Even if her skin turns black, so what?

“I heard that kiba meat is tough and stinky. Only the denizens of Forest's Edge will eat it. How pitiful.”

The boy laughed out loud. At this moment, a woman fetching water happened to pass

by and knocked the boy's head.

"Hey, don't say that so loudly. If the denizens of Forest's Edge hear you, they will drag you into the forest."

Tara felt gloomy again.

She then yelped, stood up and said:

"It's already noon! I need to return to the stall! See you tomorrow!"

"Yes, bye bye!"

Tara waved her hands and quickly rushed to the north.

She bought a kimyusu meat bun along the way. In the entire Post Station Town, the meat bun was Tara's favorite snack.

...I want to know how kiba tastes.

She couldn't get that thought out of her mind.

Karon thigh meat was tough, and she didn't like karon meat unless it was a stew that had been cooked for a long time.

Was kiba meat tougher than karon thigh meat?

Kimyusu meat was soft and easy to swallow. But it didn't have much taste and had to be eaten together with Myam and herbs to give it flavor.

Was kiba plainer than kimyusu?

Tara probably couldn't ever taste karon loin meat or kimyusu meat with skin. Only a minority of the Post Station Town residents could enjoy such luxurious delicacies.

Even so, just getting to eat kimyusu and karon every day was already very fortunate. Her father kept saying that when they were poor, they couldn't even afford meat and could only eat kimyusu egg all day.

...I want to try eating kiba meat.

Tara kept thinking about that as she ran on the streets.

When Tara finally reached her father's stall, she saw a figure of a black-haired youth.

"Ah! Asuta onii-chan!"

She shouted happily.

She stopped suddenly when she saw the person beside Asuta.

It wasn't Ai Fa.

It was a hunter from Forest's Edge who was about Ai Fa's height.

The young hunter was shorter than Asuta, wore a kiba cape with a sabre and machete on his waist. He had yellowish brown hair and light chestnut colored eyes

With gaits as smooth as a wild beast, he walked towards Tara.

"Brat! You are about bratty Rimee's size. How old are you?"

His voice was loud.

He studied Tara with a strong gleam in his eyes.

But Tara wasn't scared at all.

Asuta stood behind the youth and was smiling even though he was looking at them worriedly.

Tara squeezed out a reply.

"Eight... Eight years old..."

"That's the same as Rimee. But you are much thinner, so you look younger."

The youth squatted down before Tara.

He alternated his shining eyes between Tara and the meat bun as if he was curious.

As Tara was thinking about something, she had not bitten into the meat bun yet.

“Smell nice. Is it good?”

“...Yes.”

Tara nodded.

“I guess so.”

The youth stared at the bun.

He looked hungry.

So, Tara asked if he wanted to eat it.

A strange expression appeared on the youth's face, but he still took a bite.

“Not good at all. Asuta's cooking tastes much better.”

The youth complained after taking a bite.

“R-Really?”

Tara wasn't scared of him, but his lack of hesitation in criticizing the meat bun stunned Tara.

The young hunter was shorter than Asuta, but he seemed tougher than even the adults in town.

Is this why everyone's afraid of the denizens of Forest's Edge?

And of course, Tara couldn't keep her cool completely.

But the admiration in her heart outweighed her fear.

She thought Ai Fa and this unknown youth looked heroic and cool.

She didn't know why. Both had forthright eyes, weren't fazed by how others saw them and seemed so righteous.

After that, Kamyua Yost appeared too. They chatted for a while, then Asuta and company went home.

Tara didn't understand what they were talking about, but Asuta seemed to be planning to open a stall in the Post Station Town.

"That's amazing, Asuta is really going to open a stall."

"Yes..."

After Tara said that, Dora only gave a vague response.

Dora's face was already troubled, and now, it looked bitter.

"What's the matter? Do you feel unwell?"

"Ehh...? No, it's nothing. I'm just thinking that there are all kinds of people in Forest's Edge."

"Yes. The people with Asuta are so cool."

"Cool, huh."

Dora shook his head weakly.

Even though his father's appearance made Tara worried, she wanted to tell him something.

"Tara wants to try Asuta's cooking."

Dora shook his head with a gloomy face:

"Even if we tried kiba meat, we won't find it good. If Asuta goes around and keeps telling people that kiba tastes good, everyone will think he is a conman."

Her father's voice was filled with worry.

Tara held her father's thick arms and leaned toward his depressed face.

"We need to try it before deciding whether it tastes good or not. Can I buy Asuta's cooking with Papa's copper plates?"

After staying quiet for a moment, he patted Tara's head with his large hand.

"Tara, when you help me with my work, the copper plates I give you is your wages, you can use them as you wish... But you can't miss work with a stomach ache as an excuse."

"Yes! Thank you, Papa!"

Tara looked up at her father's face and smiled.



Four days later, Asuta opened his stall in the Post Station Town.

After the short downpour ended, Tara rushed to Asuta's stall.

"Amazing! You really opened a stall here!"

Asuta's expression seemed more lackluster than usual but received Tara with a smile right away.

A girl from Forest's Edge was working with Asuta, she had a gentle smile on her.

Tara met this girl before, and she was more cold and indifferent. But she looked really kind and gentle when she smiled.

"The tarapa smells nice! Is that the kiba meal?"

"Yes. I don't know if you will like it."

The tarapa in the pot was boiling.

Aside from the tarapa, Asuta also used many other ingredients. The fragrance was really appetizing.

When Tara wanted to buy one, he asked her to try a sample first and offered her a plate.

It was a strangely shaped meat, covered in red tarapa sauce.

The meat was flat and circular in shape. After Asuta cut it into small pieces, he placed it on the plate. The cut section of the meat seemed uneven, which felt strange to Tara.

Oh right, what kind of animal is a kiba?

Tara had never seen a kiba before.

The traps around the farm did catch kiba sometimes, but Tara and her mother had never seen them. The old women living in the vicinity once said: "You would be cursed just by seeing a kiba."

Kiba meat looked tasty.

The fragrance stimulated her appetite.

Tara put that meat into her mouth without any hesitation.

She then felt a great impact.

"What is this..."

The sourness of the tarapa was strong, but it was tastier than the tarapa she ate at home. Just like the small tarapa that could be bought in the castle town, they were sweet and wonderful.

The diced vegetable cooked together with the tarapa had to be aria. Did the aria bring out this sweetness?

Tara felt a tinge of spiciness and deduced that pico leaves were added to the sauce too. She heard that there were plenty of pico leaves in the Morga Forest.

To sum it up, Tara had never tasted such a delicious sauce.

However— the taste of the kiba was strong and on par with the sauce.

The kiba wasn't tough and didn't stink. It broke apart with a gentle bite and mixed together with the tarapa sauce. A strong taste spread inside her mouth.

Tara never imagined that such delicious meat existed in this world.

The taste lingered no matter how much she chewed. She only had a small piece, but her heart was filled with happiness.

Neither kimyusu nor karon was this tasty.

Could the kimyusu meat with skin or the karon's loin meat taste as good as kiba meat?

"Asuta-nii, this is delicious! Really delicious!"

Asuta's expression looked a little uneasy, but the lines on his face relaxed after hearing her words.

"Ah, wait! Tara, I want your father to try it too before I can accept your copper plates with ease... Eh, I don't have many picks like this, can you reuse it?"

"Yes!"

Tara nodded firmly, then ran on the street.

There was still happiness lingering in her mouth.

Tara could feel this happiness slowly spreading through her entire body.

Dora would definitely be overjoyed after tasting it.

Her father had been acting strange these days, as if he was troubled about continuing to interact with the denizens of Forest's Edge. He was drawn to Asuta and the denizens of Forest's Edge around him, but was hesitant about getting along with them so naturally.

Dora had his worries too.

Tara's mother and elder brothers who worked in the village also said: "Don't get involved with the denizens of Forest's Edge."

When Tara refuted him, Dora would always fall into a bitter silence.

A complicated feeling that Tara couldn't understand was troubling Dora.

There won't be any problems now.

Asuta wasn't a liar.

"The chief clan" was the violent ruffians who conned others.

After tasting the kiba meat, the gloomy face of her father would relax too. Tara was filled with joy just imagining that.

She dashed through the streets, splashing the puddles on the ground, and finally made it to her father.

Dora was sitting under the roof and glanced at Tara with a blank face.

"Look, this is Asuta's cooking! He used the vegetable you grew to cook such a delicious dish!"

Dora took the piece of kiba meat on the toothpick with a weak smile.

How surprised would her father be? Tara waited in anticipation.

End of Volume 4



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